Al-Ahram Weekly

No. 250 الاهرام ويكلي | Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875 | 7 - 13 December 1995 | 18 Pages | P.T.50

Day of choice

With the opposition struggling to establish a foothold in parliament, Egyptians voted yesterday in the run-off elections

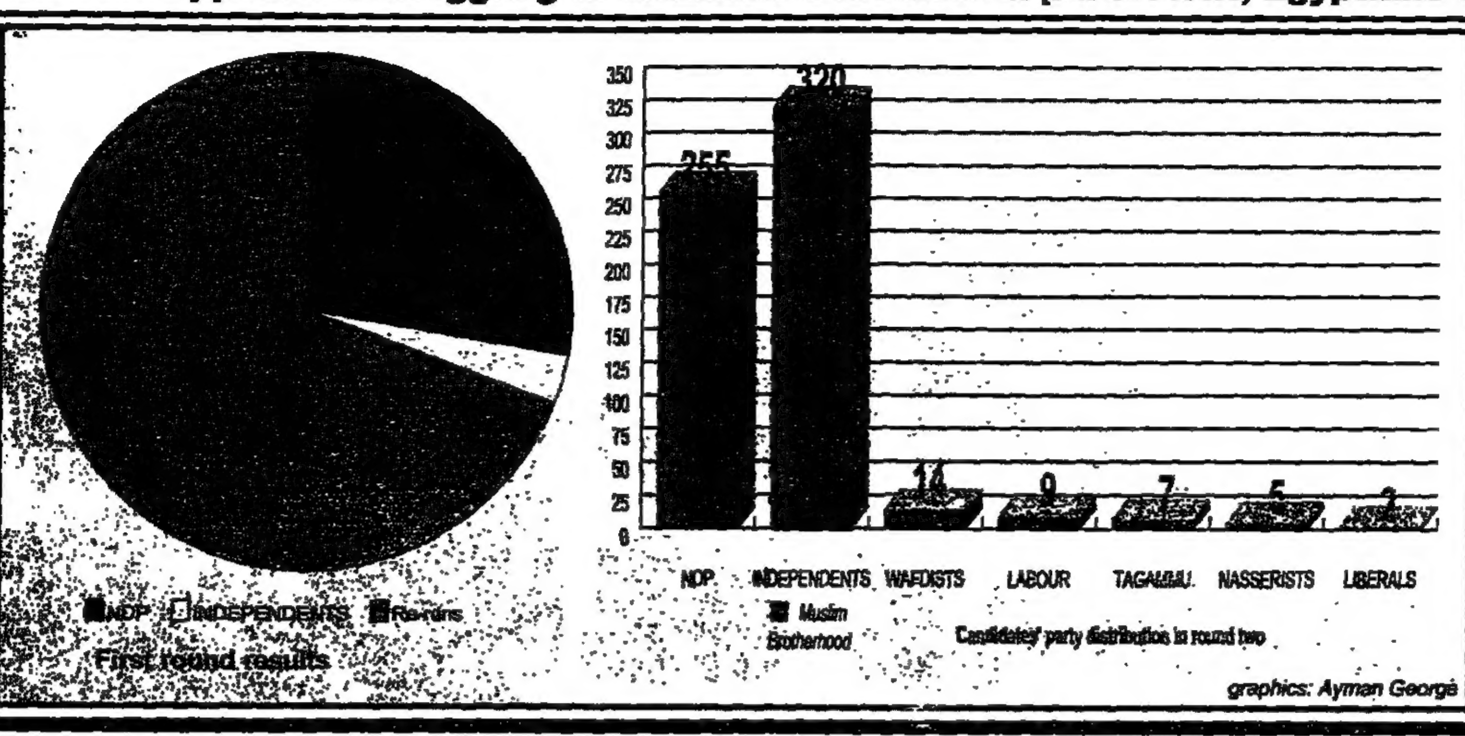



photo: Abdel-Wahab El-Sohelli

Egyptians returned to the polls yesterday in a second round of voting, to decide the fate of 306 People's Assembly seats, amid scattered violence, opposition charges of fraud and harassment and government assertions of fair play. Of the seats where the 29 November election had produced decisive results, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) scored a landslide victory, but the fate of about two thirds of the Assembly's 444 seats remained undetermined because their contestants failed to gain a simple, but decisive, majority. The election's final results will be declared this evening or Friday morning, according to sources at the Ministry of the Interior.

Vying for the 306 seats in 174 constituencies were 612 candidates — the two highest vote-winners in each district. They included 255 from the NDP, 14 from the Wafd, nine from the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, seven from the leftist Tagammu, five Nasserists, two Liberals and as many as 320 independents. Many of the latter were NDP supporters, but they also included about 20 members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

In the first round, the NDP won 124 seats, around 90 per cent of those which were won outright, 14 others went to independents. Opposition parties and the Brotherhood failed to win a single seat.

While the government said that about 50 per cent of the nation's 20 million registered voters had cast ballots in the first round, the turnout yesterday appeared to be lower.

The government went ahead with yesterday's ballot despite administrative court orders that first-round results in about 50 constituencies — out of the nation's 222 — were null and void because of vote-rigging and other irregularities. But the government contested the orders before the Supreme Administrative Court. The government lawyer, Gamal El-Labban, claimed that his appeal meant the suspension of the initial court ruling.

As in the first round, which claimed the lives of 17 people, scattered incidents of violence were reported and the opposition alleged foul play and harassment.

But Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif insisted that "all government authorities showed complete neutrality. The elections were absolutely free." He added that, "Egypt does not accept any intervention in its domestic affairs."

Prominent figures running in the second round included Ahmed Gweili, minister of supply, Mohamed Ali Mahgoub, minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments), Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the Tagammu Party, and Diaeddin Dawoud, leader of the Democratic Nasserist Party.

The Cairo constituency of Helwan was the scene of a major confrontation between the supporters of Mahgoub and his rival, the Liberal Party's Mustafa Bakri, which ended in the latter's withdrawal from the election race.

Bakri, who edits the party's mouthpiece, *Al-Ahrar*, charged that Mahgoub's henchmen had stuffed the ballot boxes with votes for the minister, that his representatives were barred from the polling stations and his supporters prevented from voting. Bakri had brought in supporters from his Upper Egyptian home town, armed with heavy sticks.

Two truckloads of Bakri supporters, armed with knives and chains, were arrested. Mahgoub's brother, Ismail, was also apprehended for bringing in a microbus loaded with heavy sticks and chains, Interior Ministry sources said.

Diaeddin Dawoud, running in the northeastern Nile Delta town of Fareskour, was greeted by hundreds of local residents, pledging their support, when he arrived at a local school used as a polling station. Dawoud, who was opposed by independent Mohamed Khalil Qweita, said he did not feel the security forces were biased, and that his failure to clinch a decisive victory in the first round was the result of the split in the vote among the numerous candidates. Some people had not bothered to vote, he continued, "because they were over-confident. They stayed away from the polls because they believed that I was going to win anyway."

A judge, who was supervising the polling, said "voting is continuing calmly. We are intent on a fair election".

In Damietta city, Ahmed Salama, a candidate of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, was running against the NDP's Yasser El-Deeb. A Salama representative alleged: "All polling stations in the town are being cordoned off by police and Salama's poll-watchers were taken to the police station. The battle has been clinched in favour of the NDP."

In the constituency of Baltim-Hamoul in the extreme north of the Nile Delta, poll-watchers for Nasserist Hamdin El-Sabahi said they were prevented from entering the polling stations. El-Sabahi alleged that 124 out of his 148 representatives were barred in Hamoul, whereas representatives of his opponent, independent Ali Hassan, were inside the stations before the official 8am opening time. "Vote-rigging is taking place openly in the full view of the police," charged El-Sabahi, who vowed to take up the matter with the judicial supervisors.

In the Qalyubiya constituency of Kafr Shukr, just north of Cairo, where Tagammu leader Khaled Mohieddin was running, police cars patrolled the streets as voting progressed peacefully. But journalists who visited Mit Al-Sebai, hometown of Mohieddin's opponent, independent Ahmed Seif, found the streets littered with broken glass and stones. Trees and the surrounding fields were burning. A large number of Central Security Forces personnel were inside the village. Journalists were told that Seif's supporters had pelted the police with stones and bottles because they had prevented them from voting.

Asked about his rival's claim that the first round election had been rigged in his favour, Mohieddin responded: "This is an old story that is told in every election".

In Alexandria, independent Adel Eid, who was opposed by the NDP's Farouk Rakha in the Bab Sharqi constituency, complained that his poll watchers were prevented from entering two polling stations out of six.

At Mina Al-Bassal, another Alexandria constituency, six truckloads of security forces were positioned outside the principal polling station. The turnout was low and only registered voters were allowed inside. But the turnout was heavy at another polling station, where 500 supporters of independent candidate Rashad Osman had gathered. The supporters apparently hailed from Osman's hometown of Sohag in Upper Egypt, and were armed with heavy sticks.

At Karmouz, a third Alexandria constituency, Tagammu candidate Abul-Ezz El-Hariri charged that his poll-monitors were prevented from entering five polling stations. Three truckloads of security forces took up positions in the area.

Alleging that the police had rounded up Osman's and Hariri's poll watchers, about 1,000 Hariri supporters demonstrated. Police used tear gas to disperse the crowd.

In the Cairo constituency of Bab Al-Sha'riya, where Wafdist Ayman Nour was running, the polling stations opened at 9am, one hour behind schedule. Nour's wife, who was watching the vote, alleged that rigging was in progress.

Nour, who was slightly injured by a gun-shot fired by an unidentified assailant the day before, arrived at the scene in the late afternoon, following his discharge from hospital. "I am not accusing anyone," he said.

At the Cairo constituency of Matariya-Ain Shams, Moukhtar Nouh, treasurer of the Bar Association, and the only prominent Muslim Brotherhood figure still in the race, was running against the NDP's Mohamed Farouq. Nouh charged that his representatives had been barred from the polling stations, two were beaten up and two others arrested.

"We have documented cases of vote-rigging," Nouh said. "Our representatives were not allowed to open the ballot boxes before the voting started, to make sure that they were empty." But a security source denied Nouh's allegations, saying the boxes had been opened in the presence of Nouh's representatives. The source insisted that none of Nouh's representatives was attacked or arrested.

Nonetheless, after the ballot closed at 5pm, Brotherhood spokesman Maamoun El-Hodeibi told the *Weekly* that several Islamist candidates had declared their withdrawal from the elections. "It is a symbolic gesture, for the candidates can do nothing. It has been a vicious process."

At the downtown constituency of Qasr Al-Nil in Cairo, where Wafdist Yassin Serageddin and Hossam Badrawi, an independent doctor and businessman, fought a fierce battle, voting was smooth but the turnout was meagre. Both candidates were met by cheering crowds.

Police officers and station chiefs were relaxed, declaring that "this is a very clean constituency with little, if any, trouble". Serageddin said that he was satisfied "so far", and that the police were successfully maintaining control.

Reported by staff

Violence mars round two

At least 10 people were killed and dozens injured or arrested in yesterday's balloting

Yesterday's violence began with the killing of an NDP supporter in Giza, south of Cairo. By the time polling stations closed at 5pm, the number of fatalities had jumped to 10. In scattered incidents across the country, dozens were injured or arrested. Interior Ministry sources said that all sides were to blame — opposition, independent and NDP supporters. The sources reported the following incidents:

— Unknown assailants opened fire on the supporters of NDP candidate Abdou Khalifa in the Giza district of Badrashein, killing one.

— In the Kafr Al-Sheikh constituency of Dessouq, a fight broke out between the supporters of NDP candidate Abdel-Moneim Zaghloul, on the one hand, and those of another NDP candidate, Mamdouh Daraz, and independent Abdel-Salam Laimouna, on the other. One man was killed, eight injured and seven arrested.

— Supporters of NDP candidate Zuheir Mansour stormed the principal polling station in the Qalyubiya constituency of Shebin Al-Qanater and were confronted by the supporters of Fathi El-Wakil, an independent NDP-sympathiser. Security forces intervened. One man was killed and nine injured.

— Six men were killed in gun battles between the supporters of NDP candidate Fahmi Omar and independent El-Sayed El-Menoufi in Naga Hammadi in Upper Egypt.

— In the Nile Delta province of Kafr Al-Sheikh a man was killed and 41 wounded in a fight between thugs, armed with chains and sulphuric acid.

— At a village near Shebin Al-Kom, in the Nile Delta province of Menoufiya, about 2,000 supporters of Islamist candidate Saad Youssef gathered outside polling stations. Their intention, sources said, was to storm the stations and rig the vote in Youssef's favour. They were confronted by the police.

— Supporters of Liberal Party candidate Mustafa Bakri, brandishing heavy sticks, attempted to disrupt voting at a Helwan polling station. One of them fired a pistol into the air and was arrested. Eleven others were also apprehended for being in possession of heavy sticks, according to police sources. Two truckloads of Bakri supporters were also arrested for the possession of knives; another supporter was arrested after being found with 20 litres of petrol which, it is reported, he planned to use for Molotov cocktails.

— Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi referred the case of Col. Hossam Mohamed El-Serafi, an Alexandria police officer and a relative of NDP candidate Hussein El-Serafi, for investigation for allegedly shooting and wounding a supporter of independent candidate Abdel-Salam Nagi Hegazi.

— El-Alfi referred police sergeant Abdel-Hamid Sorour from Port Said to military trial for taking part in the balloting, in violation of a law forbidding police to vote.

Back on Syria's track

With Peres on his travels and US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross shuffling between Syria and Israel, all eyes are on Damascus

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is due to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres in Cairo today to discuss the next step forward in the current peace process. High on the agenda will be the prospects for a resumption of the Israeli-Syrian peace talks.

Peres underlined the importance of peace with the Syrians before reaching a permanent settlement with the Palestinians in a meeting with representatives of world Jewry in Jerusalem on Tuesday.

Peace with the Syrians would not just ease relations with the Palestinians, commented the Israeli prime minister, it would also open the door to complete normalisation with the rest of the Arab world. "We would expect that once we reach an agreement with the Syrians all 22 Arab countries will come and sign a full agreement with Israel, full recognition, full relations," he added.

His comments came as US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross arrived in Israel after a five-hour meeting with Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad. Talking to reporters after a late night meeting with Peres, Ross said that what was clear "from these discussions is that both sides are very serious about wanting to make peace and both sides are serious about wanting to try to move as quickly as they can."

Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak yesterday suggested on Israeli Radio that Israel would be willing to forego its demand for direct talks at a senior level. He proposed a full range of talks which "should cover all concerned issues: a normalisation of relations, the nature of the peace, security arrangements and the size of a withdrawal [from the Golan Heights]".

Barak, who attended the Peres-Ross talks, said on Tuesday that "between now and four to six weeks, Israel will know if Syria has agreed to resume the negotiations."

Peace negotiations ground to a halt in June, over security arrangements on the strategic Golan plateau, following an Israeli withdrawal. Israel has previously rejected two Syrian conditions for their resumption — that Israel declare in advance that it is willing to withdraw from all of the Golan Heights which it seized in 1967, and that it drop a demand for a ground-based early warning station.

In a planned boost to the prospects for such talks, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher will visit the Middle East in mid-December, said the US ambassador in Cairo, Edward Walker. It is a move which will please Damascus. Syria's official press has called for direct and brave US intervention to unblock the talks.

Meanwhile, Peres made his first official visit to Jordan as prime minister on Wednesday to conclude a transport accord between the two countries and to "compare notes" with Jordan's King Hussein, before meeting with US President Bill Clinton in Washington on 11 December. Peres is also due to meet PLO leader Yasser Arafat in Gaza on Friday.

In another development, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa announced at a press conference yesterday that representatives of Hamas and the Palestinian National Authority would be invited to Cairo to help resolve their differences.

GCC walkout

THE GULF Cooperation Council's annual summit ended yesterday with the surprise withdrawal of the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad, and the entire Qatari delegation from the closing session to protest the appointment of Saudi Arabia's Jamil Al-Hujeilan as the GCC secretary-general, delegates attending the final session reported, according to Reuters and the Associated Press.

The unprecedented and embarrassing move exposed the rifts that bedevilled the meetings, which were not attended by Saudi King Fahd due to his illness. Qatar wanted its deputy minister for foreign affairs, Abdel-Rahman Al-Attiya, to head the six-member organisation.

The GCC's final declaration denounced the increase of terrorist activities and extremism within the GCC countries which were supported by unnamed outside elements. The statement condemned the use of violence and killings by extremists and vowed to cooperate in eliminating such negative phenomena.

The declaration called on Israel to put its nuclear facilities under international control and advocated clearing the Middle East of all weapons of mass destruction. It supported the successes achieved on the Palestinian and Jordanian peace tracks and called for similar results on the Syrian and Lebanese ones.

The Gulf leaders confirmed their earlier positions towards Iraq and held the Iraqi government responsible for prolonging the suffering of the Iraqi people, urging it to comply immediately with UN resolutions adopted after the 1991 Gulf War.

Earlier, the emir of Qatar and Bahrain's leader, Sheikh Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, met for two hours apparently to discuss an ongoing border feud. *(see p. 5)*

Amir charged

YIGAL Amir, the law student who confessed to assassinating Yitzhak Rabin, was yesterday formally charged with premeditated murder and his trial was set for 19 December. The judge remanded Amir in custody until the end of the trial.

The court delayed for a month bringing formal charges against Amir's brother, Hagai, and friend, Dror Adani, who are accused of making, possessing and carrying illegal weapons. They are also accused of forming an underground group to attack Palestinians and set fire to their homes in an attempt to prevent the implementation of the PLO-Israeli autonomy accord.

According to the charge sheet published on Tuesday, the three suspects had dreamed up numerous ways of killing Rabin and then Foreign Minister Shimon Peres over the last two years. The most bizarre plan was to drill a hole into the water pipes leading to Rabin's home near Tel Aviv and insert nitroglycerine into them to blow the house up. Finally, they decided to use the pistol legally owned by Yigal Amir. The other two suspects did not know that Amir had chosen the night of the peace rally to kill Rabin.

INSIDE

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First round to the NDP

The NDP swept to a landslide victory in the first round of parliamentary elections on 29 November. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

Opposition parties and the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood suffered their worst defeat in many years and the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) scored a sweeping victory in a turbulent first round of parliamentary elections held on 29 November.

With a record number of candidates, 3,980, competing for the 444 seats of the People's Assembly, and a heavy turnout, officially set at 50 per cent of the nation's 20 million voters, the NDP won 124 seats in the first round. Those elected include at least 88 members of the outgoing Assembly who successfully retained their seats. Opposition parties failed to win a single seat. Fourteen independents, including 11 NDP sympathisers, made it to the house.

In yesterday's second round run-off, 612 candidates were competing for the Assembly's remaining 306 seats.

Opposition charges that the first-round vote had been rigged in favour of NDP candidates were denied by Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi and other high officials.

At a news conference on Saturday, El-Alfi said that about 10 million voters, or some 50 per cent of those registered, took part in the first round — "the highest number of voters ever to take part in elections in the nation's parliamentary history". The turnout averaged 13 per cent in Cairo, 50 per cent in Upper Egypt, 45 per cent in Suez Canal cities and border areas, and 65 per cent in Lower Egypt.

Although the balloting was marred by many incidents of violence, El-Alfi described it as a "democratic landmark", adding that, "Voters freely chose their representatives from among those who wish to preserve security and stability, those who do not trade in religion or wear its mask."

Rejecting opposition charges of fraud, El-Alfi said that ballot boxes which candidates claimed contained rigged votes were excluded from the vote-count. The best proof that security authorities had not interfered in the balloting, he said, was the failure of Adel Sidki, brother of Prime Minister Atef Sidki, in the Qalyubiya constituency of Toukh, and the fact that two cabinet ministers — Mohamed Ali Mahgoub (Al-Awqaf or religious endowments) and Ahmed Gweili (Supply) — did not make it in the first round and were running in the second.

El-Alfi added, however, that disciplinary action would be taken against some police officers who were suspected of favouring certain candidates.

Among the successful runners in the first round were seven cabinet ministers: Youssef Wali, minister of agriculture and NDP secretary-general (in Ibshway, Fayoum); Amal Osman, minister of social affairs (in Dokki, Giza); Mahmoud El-Sherif, minister of local administration (in Mansoura, Daqahliya); Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs (in Al-Bagour, Menoufiya); Mohamed El-Ghamrawi, minister of state for military production (in Helwan, Cairo); Maher Abaza, minister of power (in Tellin, Saharqiya) and Suleiman Metwalli, minister of transport (in Quessna, Menoufiya).

Other prominent NDP candidates who won seats in the first round included Ahmed Fathi Sorour, speaker of the outgoing Assembly (in Sayeda Zeinab, Cairo); Zakaria Azmi, chief of the presidential staff (in Zeitoun, Cairo); Abdel-Moneim Emara, chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (in Nasr City); El-Sayed Rashed, chairman of the Labour Federation (in Sidi Gaber, Alexandria) and Ahmed Abu-Zeid, leader of the NDP majority in the outgoing House (in Ismailia).

Six chairmen of the outgoing Assembly's committees, out of a total of 18, were also successful. They are Abdel-Ahad Gamaleddin of the complaints and proposals committee; Abdel-Aziz Mustafa of the manpower committee; Saad El-Khawalka of the transport committee; Mohamed Abdellah of the foreign affairs committee; Abu Bakr El-Basel of the agriculture and irrigation committee; and Mohamed Ali Hassan of the housing committee.

The successful NDP winners included three women: Soraya Labena (in Nasr City, Cairo); Sawsan Kilani (in Ismailia); and Galila Awad (in southern Sinai). There was not a single Copt among the winners. The NDP had not fielded any Coptic candidates, and all the independent winners were Muslim.

Businessmen who made it to the house in the first round included Ahmed Khairi, secretary of the NDP's Alexandria chapter and a member of the Egyptian Businessmen's Association; Talaat Mustafa, chairman of a big contracting and urban development company, also in Alexandria; and Abdel-Wahab Qoota, owner of a big export-import company and secretary of the NDP's Port Said chapter.

Independent winners included Mahmoud Zeinhom, a member of the outgoing Assembly who ran as an independent in Gamaliya, Cairo, after quitting the ranks of the Nasserist Party, and landlord Attiya El-Fayoumi, who defeated Adel Sidki, the NDP candidate, in the Qalyubiya constituency of Toukh.

Losers included many Islamists, both from the Labour Party and the Muslim Brotherhood, independents and candidates from the Wafd, Tagammu, Nasserist, Liberal and other opposition parties.

The defeat of Labour leader Ibrahim Shukri, who ran in his hometown, the Daqahliya constituency of Sherbin, took many observers by surprise. Shukri's parliamentary career dates back to 1949, when he was elected to represent Sherbin in the then House of Representatives. Shukri was re-elected to the Assembly after he launched the Labour Party, with the backing of President Anwar El-Sadat, in 1978.

Adel Hussein, Labour's secretary-general, also lost, in the Cairo constituency of Nasr City to Abdel-Moneim Emara, chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports.

Defeated Muslim Brotherhood candidates included: Maamoun El-Hodeibi, the organisation's spokesman, who was defeated by Social Affairs Minister Amal Osman in Dokki, Giza; Ahmed Seif El-Islam Hassan El-Banna, secretary-general of the Bar Association, in Al-Darb Al-Ahmar, Cairo; Nagi El-Shehabi in Mehalla, Gharbiya; Abul-Ela Madi in Helwan, Cairo; and Salah El-Kaffas in Tanta, Gharbiya.

Wafdist losers included Ibrahim El-Dessouki Abaza, the party's assistant secretary-general, and Mohamed Nouh, both in the Cairo constituency of Azbakiya, and Soad El-Dib in Dokki, Giza.

Losers from the leftist Tagammu Party included Fathiya El-Assal in Imbaba, Giza, Mohamed Hamam in Qasr Al-Nil, Cairo, Attiya El-Serafi in Mit Ghamr, Daqahliya, Zohdi El-Shami in Damanhour, Beheira, and Lutfi Waked in Kafr Sakr, Sharqiya.

A group of prominent independents who made up a significant opposition force in the outgoing Assembly also lost their seats. They included: Fikri El-Gazzar (in Qoutor, Gharbiya); Kamal Khaled (in Damietta); Galal Gharib (in Quessna, Menoufiya); Mohamed El-Sendiouni (in Al-Riad, Kafr Al-Sheikh); and Abul-Fadl El-Gizawi (in Giza).

Journalists out of the race include Mohamed Abdel-Qoddous, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, in Boulaq, Cairo; Wafdist Abbas El-Tarabili in Damietta and the Liberal Party's Mohamed Amer in Beni Ebeid, Daqahliya.

NDP deputy chairman Mustafa Khalil, speaking to Amira Howeidy, says the overwhelming NDP victory in the first round of the elections was only to be expected


photo: Sherif Sonbol

The 'natural' winner

People choose the candidates who can serve them best. This is how Mustafa Khalil, deputy chairman of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) for foreign relations, explained the NDP's landslide victory in the first round of parliamentary elections.

Poor opposition television performances and the failure of some leaders to condemn terrorism in unequivocal terms, were also responsible for the NDP's success, according to Khalil, a former prime minister under the late President Anwar El-Sadat.

In a telephone interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Khalil said that election turnout was usually low in the cities but higher in provincial areas. "The people in the provinces elect candidates on the basis of family loyalties, their posts and the scope of the services they can provide," said Khalil.

"The candidate who can solve the problems in the constituency will win a seat in the People's Assembly. Why should the people vote for an opposition figure, knowing he cannot help them in that way?" Khalil said. He acknowledged that this was an indication of political backwardness, but, added: "This is the way things are done in Egypt."

In Khalil's opinion the performance of opposition leaders on national television was poor and did little to boost their parties' chances. "They said nothing to encourage the voters," he said. "I don't think they managed to persuade them."

The bombing of the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad also drove a wedge between some opposition forces — an allusion to Islamist candidates — and public opinion, according to Khalil. "Many voters objected to the soft position taken by those opposition forces on terrorism," he said. "Some opposition parties went as far as justifying terrorist crimes, describing them as a result of certain social and economic conditions. They did not condemn the phenomenon of terrorism in unambiguous terms and this affected their popularity."

The Islamists wanted to establish their own political party on religious foundations, which was prohibited by law, he continued. "I agree with this law. Take the examples of Iran and Sudan. Both are unacceptable. We should not forget the violent history of the Muslim Brotherhood when they had an underground military wing. We should not believe what they say now [about renouncing violence] because they are using democratic methods only as a means to assassinate democracy."

The NDP's past record was another factor that contributed to its success, Khalil said. "The achievements of the NDP speak for themselves. What has the opposition ever done? What could it have done even if it had won 25 or 30 per cent of the parliamentary seats? Would any of the opposition parties have been able to implement their policies?"

He brushed off criticism of the NDP from the opposition press. These newspapers, he said, were mainly concerned with tarnishing the NDP's image and belittling its achievements. "All they care about is making allegations against the NDP," he said. "But this policy has the opposite result, because people can see the NDP's achievements with their own eyes. So they simply chose not to vote for the opposition."

Bracing for round two

After failing to win a single seat in the first round, opposition parties struggled in yesterday's run-off elections to establish a foothold in the People's Assembly. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

After denying rumours of a planned boycott, key opposition figures who survived the first round of parliamentary elections on 29 November made preparations throughout the week for yesterday's run-off elections. The boycott rumours circulated after a national newspaper ran a small front-page story quoting Ibrahim Dessouki Abaza, assistant-secretary general of the Wafd Party, as saying that the opposition parties were considering a collective walkout from the second round.

Abaza and other opposition figures denied the report. But Mustafa Kamel Murad, chairman of the Liberal Party, said withdrawal from the second round was the subject of consultations between the various opposition parties.

Three hundred and six parliamentary seats were up for grabs in the run-offs, contested by 612 candidates — two for each seat. The two contestants in each constituency had garnered the highest number of votes in the first round, but fell short of the required majority of 50 per cent plus one vote.

The runners included 320 independents, 255 NDP candidates, 14 Wafdists, nine from the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, seven from the leftist Tagammu, five Nasserists and two Liberals. However, nearly two thirds of the independents are NDP sympathisers or former NDP members, who were likely to rejoin its ranks if they won. Over 20 candidates from the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, running as independents, also took part.

Two of the NDP candidates were cabinet ministers who failed to make it in the first round. They are Ahmed Gweili, minister of supply, running against Mohamed Badawi Dessouki, an independent, in Giza, and Mohamed Ali Mahgoub, Minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments), running against the Liberal Party's Mustafa Bakri in the Cairo constituency of Helwan-Tebbin.

The Wafdist hopefuls included Yassin Serageddin, brother of Wafd chairman Fouad Serageddin, who was opposed by independent Hossam El-Badrawi, a doctor and business tycoon, in the Cairo constituency of Qasr Al-Nil; Noaman Gomaa, the Wafd's deputy chairman, whose rival was the NDP's Ismail Hilal in the Giza constituency of Imbaba, and Mounir Fakhri Abdel-Nour, also a businessman, against the NDP's Ahmed Fouad Abdel-Aziz in the Cairo constituency of Al-Waili.

The nine Labour candidates included Abdel-Aziz Ashri against the NDP's Hassan Shibria in Fayoum; Saad Hussein against the NDP's Shafik El-Ganzouri in the Menoufiya constituency of Batanoon, and Younis Abadi against independent Zaki Mehawed in the Alexandria constituency of Moharram Bey.

The candidates of the leftist Tagammu were led by the party's chairman, Khaled Mohieddin, whose failure to win in the first round surprised many observers. Mohieddin ran in his hometown of Kafr Shukr, in the Qalyubiya governorate, against independent Ahmed Seif. Other Tagammu candidates included El-Badri Farghali against the NDP's Mohamed El-Tobgi in Port Said and Abul-Ezz El-Hariri against the NDP's Abbas El-Sayed in the Alexandria constituency of Karmooz.

The Nasserist Party's most prominent candidate was party leader Diaeddin Dawoud, who ran against independent Mohamed Khalil Qouta in Faraskour near Damietta. Another Nasserist was Sameh Ashour, opposed by independent Mustafa Bakr in the Sohag constituency of Saqalta.

The Liberal Party's two candidates were Hilal Hemeida, the party's secretary-general, who is running against the NDP's Sayed Shaker in the Cairo constituency of Abdin, and Mustafa Bakri, running against Mohamed Ali Mahgoub, minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) in Helwan-Tebbin, south of Cairo.

At least 20 candidates belonging to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood ran as independents. They included Moukhtar Nouh, treasurer of the Bar Association, against the NDP's Mohamed Farouq in the Cairo constituency of Matariya; Ahmed Salama against independent Yasser El-Dib in Damietta; Ali Fath El-Bab against the NDP's Mohamed Mustafa in Helwan-Tebbin; Mohamed El-Azabawi against independent Abdel-Moneim El-Oleimi in Tanta, provincial capital of Gharbiya governorate; and Abdel-Rehim El-Sheikh against the NDP's Fathi Abdel-Latif in the Alexandria constituency of Moharram Bey.

Other than NDP sympathisers and Brotherhood figures running as independents, a group of genuine independents from various ideological trends also took part. This group included leftist Ahmed Taha against the NDP's Sayed Rostom in the Cairo constituency of Al-Sahel; Nasserist Metwalli El-Nomrosi against the NDP's Ali Radwan, also in Al-Sahel; Nasserist Mohamed El-Badrashini against the NDP's Abdel-Rahman Harira in the Alexandria constituency of Ghorbal; Nasserist Adel Eid against the NDP's Farouk Rakha in the Alexandria constituency of Bab Sharqi; and Nasserist Farouk Metwalli against the NDP's Amin Hilal in Suez City.

In addition to Mustafa Bakri, two journalists were also in the running: Nasserist Hamdin Sabahi against independent Ali Abdel-Hafez in the Kafr Al-Sheikh constituency of Al-Hamoul and Wafdist Ayman Nour against the NDP's Sobhi Gneidi in the Cairo constituency of Bab Al-Sha'riya.

Three Copts were left in the race. They were Father Salib Matta Sawiris, an independent, against the NDP's Reda Wahdan in the Cairo constituency of Shubra; independent Fayek Akhnoukh Botrous against the NDP's Fathi Abdel-Hamid in another Shubra constituency; and Wafdist Mounir Fakhri Abdel-Nour against the NDP's Ahmed Fouad Abdel-Aziz in Al-Waili.

Gunshot at Bab Al-Sha'riya

THE SECOND round got off to a bumpy start when an unknown assailant fired a pistol shot at journalist Ayman Nour, Wafd Party candidate in the working-class Cairo neighbourhood of Bab Al-Sha'riya, wounding him slightly, reports **Reem Leila**.

Nour, who is running against Sobhi Gneidi, an NDP-sympathising independent, was riding in his car when he was hit. Fellow journalist Mustafa Shafiq was driving Nour through the district during a campaign round on the eve of the run-off elections.

Speaking from his hospital bed, Nour said he saw a man emerge from behind a pickup truck and come forward in the direction of his car. Nour then heard a thud as the single pistol shot fired by the assailant smashed the car's windshield.

At first Nour did not realise he had been hit and felt no pain. He went to Bab Al-Sha'riya police station to report the attack, but while he was there he began bleeding from his left side and was rushed to hospital.

The bullet had reportedly first passed through a book in Nour's shirt pocket, before entering his body. Although the wound was described by doctors as "superficial", he was placed in intensive care as a precaution against possible complications because he is diabetic.

Nour said the attacker was around 40, short, well-dressed, white-skinned, bespectacled and with blondish hair.

Police surrounded the scene of the attack, but the assailant escaped.

Nour's rival, Gneidi, described the attack as "theatrics" arranged by the Wafd Party. "We all know that the opposition resorts to such tricks," he said.

But one of Nour's supporters insisted there was no way he could have arranged the attack himself. "He is diabetic and could not possibly risk his own life," the supporter said.


photo: Mohamed M. Lutfi

Brawn in the ballot

The 29 November first round of elections was marred by unprecedented violence that claimed the lives of 17 people and injured dozens of others. Shaden Shehab reports

Violence, with supporters of rival candidates using firearms, iron chains and heavy sticks, broke out on the eve of the first round of elections, and continued on election day, 29 November, even after the results were announced. By last Saturday, 17 people had been killed and nearly 100 others injured. Observers said it was the worst outbreak of election-related violence in memory.

Three people died, one in the Mediterranean town of Damietta, another in Qalyubiya, a province just north of Cairo, and the third in the Upper Egyptian governorate of Qena, on the eve of the balloting. On election day itself, five more people were killed and about 50 were injured. In the few days that followed, the number of deaths soared to 17 and the number of injured to nearly 100.

The northern Nile Delta province of Kafr Al-Sheikh had the greatest share of fatalities — eight. Other deaths were reported in Daqahliya, Sharqiya and Qalyubiya — all in the Nile Delta — and in Giza, south of Cairo, and the Upper Egyptian province of Sohag.

The violence ran concurrently with a campaign of arrests against members and supporters of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. Interior Ministry sources said 95 of them remained behind bars for disrupting public order and staging anti-government demonstrations near polling stations during balloting in eight governorates. The sources said knives and chains were seized, which those arrested had planned to use to intimidate voters and prevent them from casting their ballots.

Three of the five who were killed on election day died as a result of violence between the supporters of rival candidates. The two others were old women who died in the coastal town of Balteem when police fired tear gas canisters to disperse supporters of Nasserist candidate Hamdin El-Sabahi. The Nasserist Party said the women died of suffocation, but the Interior Ministry said they were trampled to death by other demonstrators.

On election day in the town of Biyala in the governorate of Kafr Al-Sheikh, a crowd hurled stones at a police station. Their action drew police fire, and a man was killed. In Giza a worker for an independent candidate was stabbed to death by a supporter of an NDP rival. On the same day, a man was killed in a gun battle between the supporters of two rival candidates from the same family in Sohag.

More deaths occurred on the following day, as the votes were being counted. In the town of Qalleen, also in the governorate of Kafr Al-Sheikh, about 2,000 supporters of NDP candidate Mohieddin El-Qattan, claiming the vote was rigged in favour of his opponent, independent Abdel-Aziz Doma, attempted to storm a police station. In the melée that followed, a man was killed and 21 injured, including six policemen.

In the town of Mit Ghamr in Daqahliya, a man was killed and four were wounded in a fight between the supporters of two rival independents, Mortada Mansour and Mohamed El-Nazer. The rioters set car tyres ablaze along the Mit Ghamr-Mansoura highway, disrupting traffic. A large number of Central Security Force personnel arrived at the scene, and the situation was brought under control.

In the town of Beba, in the governorate of Beni Suef in central Egypt, NDP candidate Ali Abdallah shot and critically wounded his independent rival, Said Selim.

Even after preliminary results were announced, the violence continued. On Friday, supporters of two rival candidates in the town of Balyana in Sohag exchanged fire. As a result, a woman was killed and four others were injured. On the same day, a man was beaten to death in an argument over the outcome of the elections in Mit Ghamr.

On Saturday, two more lives were lost. In the Nile Delta province of Sharqiya, a peasant was killed in a shootout between the supporters of two rival candidates in the second round. In Sohag, the son of a losing candidate killed his brother, allegedly for the latter's failure to support their father.

'Nobody is blameless'

An independent election-watch committee held the government, opposition parties, the Muslim Brotherhood and independents responsible for irregularities in the first round of parliamentary elections

An independent election-watch committee has reported violations of the law, ranging from the expulsion of poll-watchers to physical assaults, which it blamed on both the government and the various political forces that contested the first round of parliamentary elections on 29 November.

"Many infringements, some of them gross and flagrant, were committed on election day by some candidates and their supporters, including the candidates of opposition parties, the Muslim Brotherhood and independents," the committee said in a report on the first round. "But the majority of these infringements were committed either by the state authorities or in their full view without any attempt on their part to prevent or document them."

The committee's chairman is Dr Said El-Naggar, a renowned economist; Dr Milad Hanna, a housing expert, is deputy chairman, and sociologist Dr Saadeddin Ibrahim, secretary-general. With the participation of six human rights groups and non-governmental organisations, the committee said it had deployed 600 human rights activist volunteers to observe the elections in 88 constituencies.

Listing its conclusions, the committee noted that a record number of candidates, nearly 4,000, had contested the elections. Two thirds of them were independents, including a significant number of Muslim Brotherhood members. Fifty-six Christians stood for election, either independently or as opposition nominees. A large number of candidates spent exorbitant amounts of money on their election campaigns, in violation of the LE5,000 ceiling set by law.

In the weeks preceding the elections, the committee received 1,100 complaints from candidates, but was able to verify the authenticity of only 264 of them. They mainly concerned irregularities in voters' lists. In 50 out of 88 electoral districts, some names were listed more than once, and sometimes as many as 20 times, "which proves that this was neither a coincidence nor an error". Between five and eight per cent of the names on the electoral rolls belonged to dead people, the committee said.

On election day, the committee said it received more than 1,240 complaints from candidates or their representatives, as well as from voters. Noting a relatively heavy voter turnout, the committee reported confusion at many polling stations as large numbers of voters, who had already waited in long queues, had to move from one station to another to try and find where they were registered. Between 15 and 20 per cent of voters got nowhere and gave up trying.

Sixty per cent (744) of the complaints came from the candidates of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist-oriented Labour Party. The committee was able to verify 149 of these complaints, many of which concerned the arrest of about 600 Brotherhood and Labour sympathisers as well as the use of violence against Islamist supporters. As an example, the committee cited the case of the Giza constituency of Dokki, where a polling station for women voters was stormed and 37 women supporters of Brotherhood candidate Maamoun El-Hodeibi were arrested and detained until the following day.

"But the widescale fraud in numerous electoral districts did not only favour the candidates of the ruling party," the report said. "The committee also received complaints about vote-rigging by candidates of the principal opposition parties and independents, including Brotherhood members."

Seventeen per cent of the complaints reported that some polling stations opened their doors at 9 or 10am, instead of 8am. And when they eventually opened, poll-watchers from the National Democratic Party (NDP) were already inside.

Twelve per cent of the complaints reported that the managers of some polling stations refused to open the ballot boxes before the voting started, to ascertain that they were empty. Their refusal raised suspicions that rigged ballots had been placed inside the boxes in advance. In some cases, boxes were opened on the orders of the judge running the polling station, and rigged votes were found inside.



Said El-Naggar Milad Hanna Saadeddin Ibrahim

Forty per cent of the complaints reported that poll-watchers had been kept outside polling stations, despite being in possession of power of attorney documents. The observers were told that their papers must carry the approval of a certain police officer. Locating this officer took hours and, in some cases, he refused to approve the papers. As a result, some candidates were left without representatives inside the polling stations for periods of between one and five hours.

Thirty per cent of the complaints reported that poll-watchers were ejected from polling stations by people who were said to be police agents, but whose identity the poll-watchers were unable to establish. Some of those who refused to leave were physically attacked, the committee said.

Fifteen per cent of complaints reported physical assaults by candidates, their supporters, or thugs, the committee added. These included a police attack on Dr Hilmi Nammar, a candidate and chairman of a professional syndicate, and his wife.

Hisham Mubarak, director of the Human Rights Legal Aid Centre, one of the six NGO's making up the committee, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that police were neutral on election day. "But this was a passive neutrality," he added. "As a result police did not provide security or legal support to some candidates and their representatives in face of the physical intimidation by some NDP and independent candidates."

هكذا من الأصل

Police side story

Maj. Gen. Mohamed Al-Taher Hegab, first assistant for administrative affairs to the interior minister, explains the role of the police in the 29 November elections, rebuffing opposition charges. Hegab spoke to **Jailan Halawi**

photo: Ashraf Fares

There was an upsurge in violence on election day, 29 November. Does this mean that the police were lax in performing their duty?

We all know that the elections were contested by all the opposition parties, in addition to the ruling party and independents. The number of candidates was exceptionally high, with as many as 50 running in some electoral districts. Naturally, this resulted in fierce competition; that competition erupted into violence in some areas.

Now for the police role, I strongly believe that every single act of violence was dealt with by the police on the spot. But we act within the limits of the law and not according to emergency measures.

Throughout the nine hours of voting, all acts of violence were reported to the authorities immediately and those who were arrested were referred to the prosecution authorities. Moreover, I strongly believe that had the police forces not discharged their duty efficiently, the election process would not have been as successful as it was.

Reports in the opposition press claimed that supporters of Islamist candidates were rounded up on the eve of the elections. What truth is there in this?

It is an old trick for someone who has failed to achieve his target to blame his failure on someone else. Police do not arrest people for no reason.

I am not denying that people representing various trends were arrested, but this was because they violated the law or threatened the safety of others. No one is above the law. Even those who justified their use of violence by claiming that they represented a candidate were arrested and referred to the prosecution authorities.

Some opposition candidates complained that their poll-watchers were not allowed into the polling stations. Is this true, and is there any legal basis for such action?

Since we say that we act within the limits of the law, let us see what the law has to say about this matter. It states that each candidate has the right to delegate one poll-watcher inside the polling station. But it also states that there should be no more than six observers at any one polling station.

If there are more than six candidates, the law states that the head of the polling station should allow the candidates to reach a compromise on who should represent them or else he [the head of the polling station] should draw lots.

These procedures should begin at 8am and last no longer than 30 minutes. Anyone who arrives afterwards is not allowed to take part. We did not invent a new law... The reason for some of the problems that were reported was that people who arrived late did not respect the law and insisted on entering the polling stations. When they were denied entry, they started causing trouble, either by acting violently or claiming that the police had kicked them out.

This problem will not arise in the second round run-off, in which either two or four candidates will be running in each constituency.

An opposition newspaper published the picture of a police officer filling a ballot box, presumably with votes for NDP candidates. What is your comment?

First of all, let me stress that the elections are held under the supervision of the judiciary. In every principal polling station, a judge is always available. Why didn't the person who took this picture report the matter to the judge, who would have ordered the arrest of anybody violating the law and referred him to the prosecution authorities? The judge at the principal polling station is in charge, not the police.

Moreover, the law stipulates that the head of each polling station should affix his signature next to the name of each voter who arrives to cast his ballot, and that the number of signatures should be equal to the number of ballots in the boxes.

Policemen are allowed inside the polling stations only after the station's head has sealed the boxes with red wax. Their task is to guard the boxes and carry them safely to the vote-counting committees.

The picture of a policeman inside a polling station could have been taken at that time; otherwise, why did nobody complain to the authorities? Moreover, most of those who filed complaints did so after the polls had closed. Why didn't they complain at the time of the alleged violation, so that any possible police malpractice could have been dealt with?

An eye-witness in the Dokki constituency, where the Muslim Brotherhood's Maamoun El-Hodeibi ran against Social Affairs Minister Amal Osman, claimed that a box containing votes rigged in the minister's favour was brought in to replace another box? Could such a thing happen?

The vote-counting committee is made up of judges and headed by the chairman of a court of law. Is it possible that a man who holds such a high position, requiring complete integrity, would allow himself to watch while one ballot box is replaced by another?

This could never happen, but, assuming that it did, why didn't this eye-witness report the matter to the head of the committee, the nearest police station or even the local prosecutor?

There were reports that two women died of suffocation in the northern town of Baltim after police fired tear gas to disperse supporters of Nasserist candidate Hamdin El-Sabahi. Is this true?

This demonstration was staged after rumours circulated that El-Sabahi had failed. [He will be running in the second round]. About 1,000 of his supporters marched to the headquarters of the vote-counting committee to see what was happening. We warned them three times that they should disperse, but they refused.

Police had to use the next legal option, which is to *fire tear gas canisters. As people started running,* two elderly women fell to the ground and the others trampled over them. The two women died on the spot and others were injured.

In some constituencies, certain candidates were handing out cash to buy votes. What is the role of the police in this connection?

Cash is not handed out in the presence of the police. Moreover, many people take the money and do not vote for the candidate who gave it to them.

***Some voters who went to the polling stations* where their names were registered were not allowed to cast their ballots. Why not?**

I will repeat again and again that the elections are held under judicial supervision. The police are positioned outside, not inside, the polling stations. Why didn't voters who were barred file a complaint with the judge, the nearest police station or the prosecution authorities? We announced those procedures more than once on the radio, television and in the newspapers.

Opposition candidates claimed that voters' lists included the names of dead people. Is this true?

Registration on the electoral roll is regulated by law. Under the law, when anybody reaches the age of 18 or dies, it is reported to us by the Civil Registry Department. But some people die outside Egypt or outside the districts where they are registered and their death is not reported to us. We cannot eliminate names from voter lists without being informed, either by families or through official channels.

Some candidates charge that their rivals stormed polling stations and rigged the votes. Why didn't the police intervene?

Any action of this kind was met with an immediate response from the judiciary, who excluded the votes from that polling station, and *the police, who arrested the* lawbreakers and referred them to the prosecution authorities.

Although the Islamists won around 60 seats in the 1987 elections, they fared miserably in the first round of these elections. How do you interpret this?

They do not have grassroots support or public sympathy. This is the most plausible interpretation. They made some gains in 1987 because at that time they had not resorted to violence. But after they became violent, they lost *any sympathy they might have* had.

A foreign press agency reported that at a polling station in Damietta children below 18 had voting cards and were allowed to vote. How could this happen?

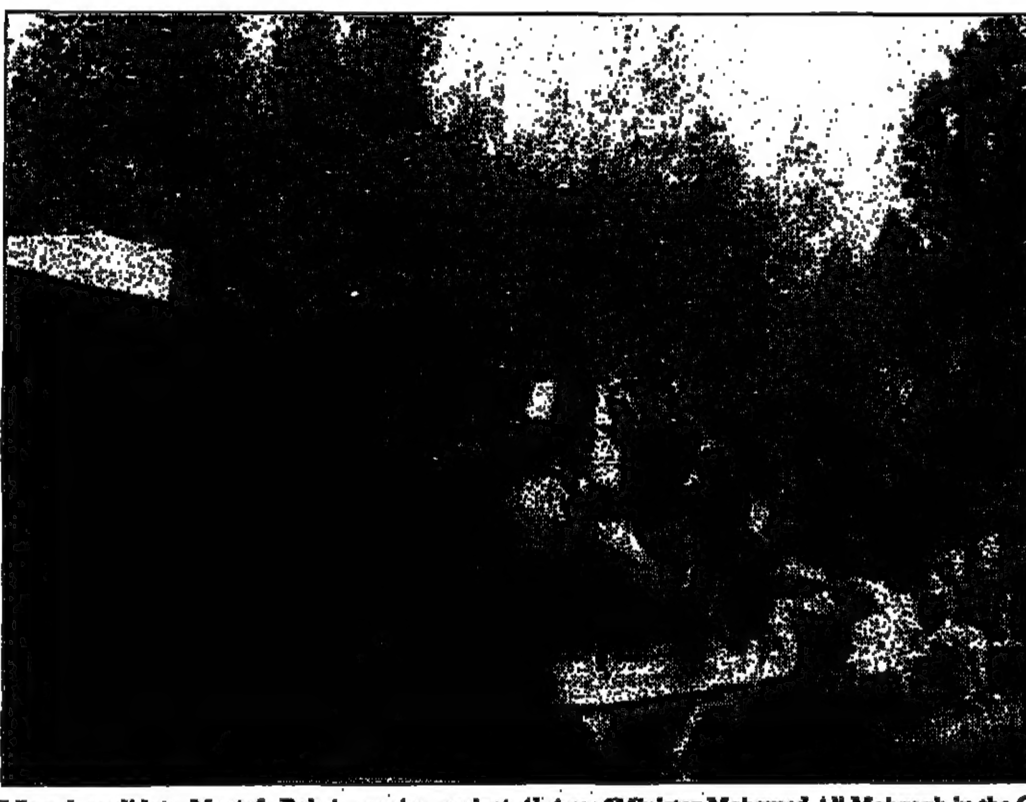
My concern as a policeman is to secure the polling station from the outside. It is the task of the judge inside, and not the police, to ascertain the identity of the voter.

I do not believe this report is true because voters are required to produce not only their voting card but also identity papers.

Reports in the opposition press claimed that some voters stuffed the boxes with numerous ballot cards, all marked for the candidate they supported. Is this true?

According to the law, the only ballots that can be considered valid are those printed at *Al-Amiriya* [government] printing house and carrying the republic's emblem.

If some people had ballots printed at other printing presses, then their aim was not to augment the vote in favour of their chosen candidate but to invalidate the votes in this particular polling station.





photos: Abdel-Wahab El-Sehelli

Liberal candidate, Mustafa Bakri, running against *Al-Awqaf* Minister Mohamed Ali Mahgoub in the Cairo constituency of Helwan, cried foul and withdrew from yesterday's second round of balloting. Earlier he trucked-in supporters from his home province of Qena, wielding swords, knives and sticks

Losers and winners

Charges of wide-scale vote-rigging by Islamist losers were denied by NDP winners who insist that they did not violate the law

Prominent Islamist figures who were defeated in the first round of parliamentary elections blamed their failure on wide-scale vote-rigging by the authorities and their rival candidates of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). But the charges were dismissed as nonsense by the NDP winners, who insisted that they had not been party to any irregularities.

Ibrahim Shukri, leader of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, who ran, but failed, in his home constituency of Sherbin in Daqahliya Governorate, alleged that his poll-watchers were denied entry to many polling stations. Moreover, he maintained that voters' lists inside the polling stations were different from those which he had been given on the eve of the election. "*Many of my supporters* could not cast their ballots because the lists in the polling stations did not include their names," he said.

Moreover, Shukri charged that the supporters of his main rival, the NDP's Fathi Mansour, acted "like bullies" and prevented his own supporters from voting in a large number of villages. "Security forces did not intervene at all," he alleged, "simply because they were not there."

Similar charges were made by Adel Hussein, Labour's secretary-general, who ran in the Cairo constituency of Nasr City but failed. "The elections were a farce," Hussein claimed, adding that his poll-watchers were required to obtain police approval of their power-of-attorney documents before they were allowed inside the polling stations. "This took hours," he said. "*In the meantime,* the boxes were filled with ballots that tipped the balance in the NDP's favour."

Moreover he alleged that his representatives were denied their legal right of accompanying the ballot boxes from the polling stations to the vote-counting committee, and that some journeys from polling station to committee took a suspiciously long time: "The trip between the two places should not take more than 15 minutes. But it took the agents of the executive authorities three hours to deliver the boxes."

Hussein said that he planned to contest the election results in an administrative court, but maintained that this would change nothing. "The Assembly will refuse to abide by the court ruling on the grounds that it is the one and only decision-making body," he said.

Abdel-Moneim Emara, chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, who defeated Hussein, insisted that there was no foul play. "As minister of youth affairs, I have not asked any young man or woman to vote for a specific candidate," Emara said. "Also, out of personal decency and respect for the law, I would never think of influencing the opinion of the Egypt's youth."

Soraya Labena, another victorious NDP candidate in Nasr City, was also confident that the election had been free and fair. "Our victory is well-earned, there is no doubt about it," she maintained. "The voters who gave us their confidence did so because they wanted true representatives who can raise important issues of concern to the public in the People's Assembly and upgrade the quality of services in the constituency."

She dismissed as "nonsense" the charge that the vote was rigged in the NDP's favour. "In my constituency, the representatives of the NDP candidates were not given any privileged treatment at all," she said. "Like the representatives of other candidates, they had to go to the local police station to get additional approval."

Opposition charges of fraud were nothing more than "sour grapes. The opposition candidates are angry because it has become clear that they do not have any public support."

Mohamed Abdel-Qoddous, a candidate for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood in the Cairo district of Bulaq, insisted that the elections had been rigged. "I was arrested three times during my election campaign and nine of my supporters were also arrested on the eve of election day," he said. "They did not allow our representatives inside the polling stations until two hours after opening time."

Abdel-Qoddous charged that eight ballot boxes in Bulaq had been tampered with in favour of the NDP, drawing protests from 16 out of 18 candidates running in the district. The rigging, he claimed, had not been carried out by the NDP candidates themselves but by the Interior Ministry.

But Badr El-Qadi, Abdel-Qoddous's NDP rival, described the Islamist candidate's defeat as "only natural".

"He has no popularity in Bulaq for two reasons: he is not a resident of Bulaq and, more important, the religion factor which he has been promoting does not count much with Bulaq voters."

Two other losing Islamist candidates — Seif El-Islam Hassan El-Banna and Maamoun El-Hodeibi — made similar charges of fraud.

El-Banna, secretary-general of the Bar Association, claimed that the the circulation of a rumour in his constituency, Al-Darb Al-Ahmar, that a bomb was about to explode inside a polling station, was evidence that the government had "played dirty". The station was closed temporarily, and, he alleged, "in the meantime, ballot boxes filled with NDP votes were brought in".

But this was denied by El-Banna's NDP rival Ahmed Shiha, who said the station was closed for only 15 minutes and that no boxes were brought in during that time.

El-Hodeibi, who was defeated in the *Giza* constituency of Dokki by Social Affairs Minister Amal Osman, said his loss had been expected. "I was not competing with an opponent, but with the state," he said.

Asked why he had decided to run when he knew his chances were doomed, Hodeibi replied: "We [the Brotherhood] must keep on trying, otherwise we will either sit in our homes or go underground. Both alternatives are unacceptable. We have a message to convey to the people and we will continue doing so via the legal channels."

Reported by staff

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**


Abdel-Moneim Said


Osama G. Harb


Hassan Nafa'a


Mustafa Kamel

Political analysts, speaking to **Mona El-Nahhas**, assess the outcome of the first round of the election and the make-up of the new People's Assembly

The price of absence

Since the dust of battle has not settled down yet, one cannot say for sure that the new Assembly will not include representatives of the opposition. But it is certain that a significant number of independents will be in the house.

The elections were characterised by violence. Some policemen were not neutral, and provoked voters. The arrest of some of the candidates' representatives on the eve of the election was not a promising sign. Another reason for the outbreak of violence was the lack of confidence in the primitive mechanism of voting and vote-counting, which might produce inaccurate results.

The failure of the opposition to win a single seat in the first round could be due to its absence from parliament for the past five years, during which NDP deputies managed to strengthen their position with their constituents. The opposition is paying the price now. But the opposition alone is *not to blame. Voters choose the candidates who* can provide them with services in their constituency. Meanwhile the opposition voice was confined to their offices and mouthpieces. Freedom-restricting laws, such as the emergency law, badly affected the performance of the opposition, obstructing its links with voters.

The positive aspects of the elections were the large number of candidates and the heavy turnout of voters, the success of some women candidates, the ability of three Copts to make it to the second round, and the emergence of several *businessmen.*

Abdel-Moneim Said
Director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies .

Battle of the weak

I believe the new People's Assembly will not be different from the old one, with NDP deputies constituting the overwhelming majority. The fact that the opposition, including the Islamist trend, did not win a single seat in the first round is primarily due to the weakness of these forces.

We cannot deny that there might have been some government intervention, but if those forces were actually powerful, nothing on earth would have affected their chances.

I think the elections showed that the opposition is in need of a complete renewal; otherwise its role will be marginal. The actual weight of the Islamist trend is much less than many people believe.

The government lacked a sharp political vision in confronting the Islamists, and the foreign media projected them as *the most effective political* force in Egypt. As a result of these two factors, Islamists were surrounded with a big halo. But nevertheless, we cannot take the result of the first round as an accurate indicator of their actual weight.

Osama El-Ghazali Harb
Editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram's Al-Siyassa Al-Dawliya *(International Politics).*

Lack of alternatives

The results of the first round revealed a severe crisis within the government, the opposition and society as a whole. Many members of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), who ran as independents, showed that they *did not adhere to the simplest* party principles, reflecting a state of anarchy and division in party ranks. But this did not matter much for the government, whose only concern was to win the largest number of parliamentary seats.

The opposition, which failed to win a single seat in the first round, should also be blamed. Each of the opposition parties nominated a limited number of candidates that did not cover all constituencies. This amounted to an admission by the opposition that it cannot act as an *alternative to the ruling NDP.*

In these negative circumstances, some people were ready to sell their votes for a few pounds. In fact, money played a key role in influencing the outcome of the elections. Violence was another negative phenomenon, an indication of a lack of maturity in society.

The only positive aspect of the elections was the heavy turnout of voters. Most people had dreamed of fair elections that would lead to some kind of political change. Unfortunately, their hopes were not realised.

I do not feel confident about Egypt's future following these elections. Curtailing the role of the opposition and the Muslim Brotherhood in this way does not reflect well on the ruling regime, which lacks a clear political vision. One should also bear in mind that the radical Islamist groups are likely to use what happened to their own advantage.

Hassan Nafa'a
Professor of political science, Cairo University.

A one-party Assembly

The results of the first round cannot be considered a real indicator of the triumph of one political party over the others. One should bear in mind that some local officials intervened in favour of NDP candidates. The interior minister himself has ordered the cases of 12 police officers and men, accused of biased policing, to be investigated.

The new parliament will be dominated by the NDP, whose deputies will occupy more than 90 per cent of seats. It should also be noted that genuine independents, who took honourable stands in the outgoing Assembly, will be absent from the new one.

So, we have to express concern that the new Assembly will be, to a great extent, a one-party Assembly, incapable of discharging its functions. The circumstances in which the elections were conducted were not the most ideal. Restrictions were imposed on the opposition's election campaigns and active members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested.

Another important point is that some yo people who are eager for change may jum the conclusion that the ballot box is not a us mechanism in bringing about this change.

Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed
Professor of political science, Cairo Universi

Monopoly-busting through the bourse

A new real estate bourse may help combat speculation and ensure market transparency, but experts fear it will do little to control soaring housing costs. **Sherine Abdel-Razek** reports

For decades, the real estate market has been characterised by speculation, with the buying and selling of properties resting in the hands of independent brokerages who dominated the market and manipulated prices. But the creation of the first real estate bourse in Egypt may be the shot in the arm the real estate market has long needed to fight speculation and ensure transparency of transactions.

"The new exchange will be the purchase and sales venue for small and large investors alike, enabling them to buy property at a fair price and a low commission," said Sayed Kammar, *general manager and* member of the National Bank of Egypt's (NBE) board of directors. "Commissions charged by the bourse from the seller will be 0.5 per cent while those charged from the buyer will be 1.5 per cent," he explained.

The new bourse, an affiliate of NBE, added Kammar, hopes to direct real estate transactions away from speculation. To this end, the bourse has set a LE25,000 insurance fee for entering the trading session.

The bourse will also offer protection for both buyers and sellers in a market which has been plagued by fraud. "The seller will not only be able to sell his property with a minimum of hassle and cost, but will also be guaranteed that the purchase documents are valid," Kammar said. "The NBE's consulting engineers will submit technical reports about the property to the buyer, and the bank could also extend loans to buyers."

Although the bourse will open its doors to large and small traders, Kammar pointed out that he does not expect properties worth less than LE60,000 to be traded in the exchange. "We expect that transactions handled during the first year to reach *LE4 billion*," he said.

Clients interested in selling their property, he explained, will present their offers to the bourse during the first ten days of each month. Bank experts will then examine and evaluate the property over the next ten days and buyers, during the last ten days, will be able to review the specifications of the property. The trading session, he continued, will be held on the first Friday of each month in the bourse's headquarters in Garden City.

Ahmed Sabbour, counsellor to the bourse and chief executive of the National Real *Estate Development Company, a joint venture* between Sabbour Group and the NBE, pointed out that the new exchange will help in stabilising prices as purchase and sales offers will be announced. This, he said, will end the monopoly real estate brokerage houses hold on buying and selling procedures which was often characterised by sharp speculation. "The bourse will help stabilise prices, but will not help in lowering them," he stressed.

While dubbing the establishment of the bourse a step towards combating speculation and maintaining transparency in the real estate market, housing expert Milad Hanna said that it is not a comprehensive solution for the housing problem.

"The exchange is a suitable mechanism for the rich to exchange property," said Hanna, a former chairman of the People's Assembly Housing Committee. He noted that inflated real estate prices will prevail so long as governmental bodies control the allocation of land in Egypt.

Hanna said that the government's control of land leads to a shortage of construction sites which in turn pushes up the price of privately owned land. "The government's grip on land exacerbates the housing problem and leads to inflated land prices," he said.

About this point, Ahmed Sabbour is in agreement. He said that large public sector companies such as the Heliopolis for Housing and Development Company entered the market as a profit making enterprise, building and selling housing units while ignoring its main role of targeting and developing new areas for construction.

Hanna noted that as purchase and sales procedures for medium and large buyers are facilitated, attention should also be directed to housing for the poor. "A new housing *fund is needed to finance and provide subsidies* for those in the lower income brackets so that they may buy or rent property," he said. "This fund should be sponsored by the Ministry of Social Affairs, not the Ministry of Housing (MOH)." The MOH, he said, is basically a profit-making body.

The money for this fund, he said, should come from the capital gains taxes levied on the sale of real estate.

And while the government has already proposed plans to distribute desert land, free of charge, to the youth, Hanna sees this move as a "crippling solution which will encourage nepotism and the abuse of authority."

Hassaballah El-Kafrawi, former housing and urban development minister, said that the bourse should be handled and controlled directly by the government instead of the NBE. "Housing, like bread production, education, medical care and other issues pertaining to the national interest, should be controlled by the government," he said. El-Kafrawi, however, expressed his hopes that the new exchange will help reduce speculation which, he says, has caused prices to increase by 100 per cent over the last two years.



Bourse for the rich? Experts fear the new bourse will not help low income housing — photo: Al-Ahram

ZAS — no sale

AN ATTEMPT to sell the assets of the defunct Zorkani Airline Services (ZAS) *fell through last week with the National Bank of* Egypt (NBE) refusing a bid submitted by EgyptAir. NBE is charged with supervising the liquidation process for the bankrupt company and is one of ZAS's major creditors.

Nabil Kamel, the interim administrator appointed by NBE, said that the bid submitted by EgyptAir was far below the targeted price. He added that another invitation to bid was placed in last week's papers. Kamel, however, declined to reveal the amount of the EgyptAir offer saying that there is still hope that another buyer *would present a better offer.*

If EgyptAir did not re-consider its offer and should no other buyers come forth, said Kamel, then the only remaining hope for the creditors and ZAS would be for an investor to step in and float the company.

ZAS, Egypt's largest private airline and the second largest after EgyptAir, the national carrier, fell into deep financial straits following the Gulf War. Its financial predicament was compounded beginning in 1992 when the tourism industry suffered a blow due *to Islamist activity in the country.*

As Europe seeks its southern interests, Egypt stands firm for its own

Balance in Barcelona

In the wake of the Euro-Mediterranean conference held in Barcelona earlier this week, **Mahmoud Saad** examines the arguments for and against a regional role for unified Europe

In his book *The Blood of Abraham*, former US President Jimmy Carter wrote, "In the 70s... new alignments were formed between the countries of Europe and some areas of the Middle East because of one major reason: Oil.

"A nervous Europe's need for assured supplies of energy solidified an attitude that was more balanced toward the Arab-Israeli conflict in general, and more attuned to the Palestinian dimension of the conflict, in particular... But none of these nations, or even a united European community, has the power or influence to replace the United States as a principal force for peace in the area."

In his evaluation, President Carter is, in fact, refuting one of the most popular arguments *long-debated among Arab intellectuals and academics*; namely the need for a European role in the Middle East to replace or balance out the weight of American policy in the area. This policy has been perceived by many as biased and destabilising in the long-run.

This same argument maintains that Europe's eligibility for that role is justified. Its policies toward the area are less partisan, more balanced relatively speaking, and less affected by Jewish lobbies. It is, however, affected by national interests.

At the height of the Cold War, Europe's role in the Middle East could not be envisaged due to its dependence on the US for political, economic and military support against the threat posed by the neighbouring Soviet Union. But with the collapse of this bi-polar world order, this political umbilical chord has been cut and Europe is free to follow any policy it chooses.

Theoretically speaking, some of these arguments could bear some truth. What has not been factored into this reasoning is Europe's ability, or readiness, to play that role as one bloc.

In fact, the notion that Europe will evolve into a unified political entity in the foreseeable future is debatable. More likely, a power cluster will emerge made up of one or two regional powerhouses such as Germany or Great Britain, joined by several, less influential European nations. This cluster, utilising its centralised authority, could steer Europe along the path most appropriate to realising those goals, domestic or international, that are in its best interests.

But one of the drawbacks to such a regional structure is that it often opens a window of vulnerability, both in terms of consensus building and consensus maintenance. Therefore, tough *decisions or positions tend to be handled on* a case-by-case basis, or simply not maintained for an extended period of time.

However, these reasons are not sufficient enough to warrant ruling out a significant role for Europe in the Middle East. Its participation in developing the Middle East could, if directed appropriately, increase regional stability, minimise fallout and negate the consequences of misguided policies emanating from inside or outside the region.

Europe has a lot more to contribute, and has the ability and the means to promote development. It, however, lacks the will. Its recent efforts to focus on the nations south of the Mediterranean, in order to forge stronger bonds with its neighbours, most of whom are Arab, perhaps signal the start of a new era of mutually-beneficial, comprehensive, inter-regional cooperation.

The writer is first secretary and deputy director of the Balkan and East Europe Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

First things first

Egypt kept its prospective economic partnership with the EU well in sight during the Barcelona conference, a prominent member of the Egyptian delegation tells **Niveen Wahish**

Politics may have overshadowed economics at the Euro-Mediterranean conference in Barcelona last week, but as the conference statement was being hammered out, the Egyptian delegation had the Egypt-EU partnership — currently being negotiated — at the back of their minds.

Ambassador Mohamed Fathi El-Shazli, who headed the Egyptian delegation to the conference's preparatory meetings, said Egypt was eager to ensure that the terms of the Barcelona statement do not compromise its negotiating position in the partnership agreement.

"We made sure that there were no terms in the declaration that could later force Egypt to sign any unwanted articles in the partnership," El-Shazli said. "We agreed on the principle of setting up a free trade area, but the declaration does not oblige us to any duties, nor do we acquire any rights as a result of it," he added.

For the past year, Egypt and the EU have been locked in heated negotiations over a cooperation agreement that is part of Europe's attempt to establish a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area (FTA) by the year 2010. Controversy over the length of the transitional period for establishing the FTA, the protection of Egypt's local industries and EU rules of origin limiting the access of Egyptian goods to European markets have been plaguing the talks.

The Barcelona Declaration, made up of three chapters, called for greater Mediterranean-European cooperation on the political, economic and cultural levels, promoting peace in the region, creating a free trade area and encouraging cultural exchange among the member countries within the boundaries of the values of each country.

According to El-Shazli, Egypt, while strongly backing its Arab neighbours on issues pertaining to nuclear non-proliferation and terrorism, was also keen to secure its position in the FTA. During conference talks over agricultural policy, Egyptian negotiators were particularly concerned about the effects of the European Central Agricultural Policy (CAP) on agricultural exports.

El Shazli described the conference as a "third level" of Egyptian-European cooperation; the first level being bilateral relations between Egypt and each of the European countries individually; the second level being relations between Egypt and the EU as a single entity. This third level is cooperation among the countries of the Mediterranean countries as a whole and the EU.

According to El-Shazli, the new group/group form of cooperation will have its effect on economic assistance money to the region. "It will all be pooled in one basket and each country will have to present a viable project worthy of receiving assistance," El-Shazli said.

He recommended that thorough and realistic feasibility studies be prepared in order to secure the largest portion of the $6 billion pledged by the EU for financing education and infrastructure projects in southern Mediterranean countries.

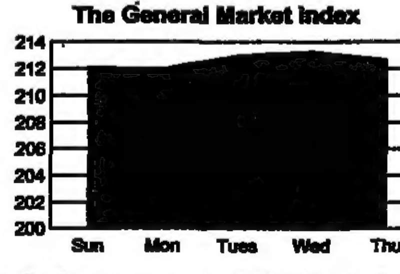
"These must be projects rich in creativity," El-Shazli said.

Commenting on the controversies which threatened to delay the release of the declaration, El-Shazli said that the situation was "not so dramatic."

"Everybody agreed on the basic principles of the conference; arguments arose simply as a result of each country's different interpretation of the declaration," he said. He added that "it is impossible to get all these countries to agree on specific points. They agreed to the general idea, they can settle their differences separately."

Market report

Cement still leads the action



THE GENERAL Market Index gained 0.81 points to close at 212.66 points for the week ending 30 November.

As a result of an increase in the share prices of some manufacturing sector companies, the index for that sector rose by 0.58 points to close at 298.58. The biggest share of the market transactions, in terms of share value and the number of shares traded, went to the Portland Torah Cement Company which traded LE11.9 million in shares, or 41.03 per cent of total market transactions. Its shares gained LE2 to close at LE47.9 by the end of the week.

Shares of the Paints and Chemical Industries Company jumped by LE19 per share to close at LE675 per share, while those of the North Cairo Flour Mills increased by LE1 per share to close at LE67 per share.

The Nasr Refractories and Porcelain Company (Sornaga) registered the highest increase in share price, jumping by 20 per cent to close at LE6 per share. Shares of the Arab Ceramic Company (Arasimco), however, did not fare so well. The company's shares lost 15.33 per cent of their value to close at LE8.45. Ameriya Cement Company's shares lost LE4.6 per share to close at LE48.4 per share, while those of El-Nasr for Clothing and Textiles (KABO) lost LE3 per share to close at LE164 per share. The losing streak also spread to Pfizer, Egypt, whose shares fell by LE0.75 per share to close at LE10.65.

The financial sector had a rough week, with its index slipping by 0.14 points. Shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) lost LE1.5 to close at LE515.5 per share, while shares of the Daqahlia Commercial Bank lost LE0.6 per share to level off at LE11.48. The value *of Misr International Bank's shares remained unchanged at* LE263 per share.

Once again, trading in service sector company shares was slow, and the value of most of the companies' shares remained unchanged.

In all, the shares of 28 companies increased in value, 15 declined and 38 remained the same.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**





Palestinian women block an Israeli bulldozer to prevent Jewish settlers from levelling their land, which has been seized by settlers from the Neve Daniel settlement next to the West Bank village of Al-Khod *(photo AFP)*

Bending redeployment

Behind the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers in Jenin this week lies not just a problem of coordination, *but differences within the Israeli military establishment, reports* **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem

On 4 December, the Israeli army's adjutant-general's office indicted Sergeant Arye Schwartz for supplying arms to Yigal *Amir, the killer of Yitzhak* Rabin. Schwartz is accused of illegally running weapons to Amir and his brother, Haggai, "throughout 1994" with the intent to "kill Arabs". It is the first indictment to arise from army investigations into the late Israeli prime minister's assassination.

For Palestinians in the Occupied Territories such complicity between the security forces and Israel's far right is hardly news. Groups *like Kach* and Gush Emmunim must, after all, have got their guns from somewhere. Of greater concern is whether such links may become reactivated to sabotage Israel's current redeployment in the West Bank. Recent events suggest that there are still some elements within Israel's security forces who appear to be seeking, rather than averting, trouble.

This is ominous given the genuine Palestinian optimism that has greeted the redeployment and especially the upcoming elections to the new Palestinian Council, confirmed by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to be held on 20 January. By the initial deadline of 2 December, over one million of the 1.2 million Palestinians eligible to vote had registered on the PNA's electoral roll, says the chairman of the PNA's Central Election Commission, Saeb Erekat. The problem is Jerusalem, with only around 40 per cent of the 160,00. Pal*estinian residents of East Je*rusalem so far registering their names.

Under the Taba (Oslo II) agreement, Palestinians from East Jerusalem can only vote for the council if they have an additional West Bank address. Many fear that in revealing this to Israel — which according to the agreement has the power to "inspect and approve" the PNA's electoral list — they may forfeit their right of residency in Jerusalem. To counter this, the PNA has extended the registration deadline indefinitely and engaged in a propaganda blitz to assure Palestinians from East Jerusalem that "registering to vote does not mean losing their ID cards", as PNA official Faisal Husseini put it.

Meanwhile, Israel's redeployment is proceeding, at speed and on schedule. On 3 December, 25 Palestinian police took up position in *Beit Jala*, near Bethlehem, making the latter the fifth West Bank city to witness the ar*rival of Palestinian security forces* in the last three weeks. Israeli army officials say that their forces should complete their redeployments from Tulkarm on 10 December, from Qalkilya and Nablus on the 15th and from Bethlehem on the 18th. Ramallah should be evacuated by the 30th.

But it is in the already "liberated" city of Jenin that problems have arisen, exposing just how fragile — and open to abuse — are *the joint PNA/Israeli* security arrangements in Taba to govern the redeployment. On 25 November, Israeli soldiers raided five villages in the Jenin area and arrested 11 "wanted" Palestinians, mostly from Islamic Jihad, say Palestinian sources. These villages fall within Taba's Area B jurisdiction, which means that Israel retains "overriding responsibility" for security. But the arrests occurred without any coordination with the Palestinian police, forcing the PNA's deputy police commander in Jenin, Wajih Abu Gharbiyeh, to fire off a *protest to the Israeli authorities.*

The same lack of coordination was apparent two days later, when two Israeli border guards "dressed half in civilian clothes, half in uniform", say Palestinian eyewitnesses, attempted to arrest Zahir Zakarneh, a Fatah activist from Qabatiya, near Jenin. Zakarneh was "wanted" for killing col*laborators, say Israeli* army sources. But he had already served time in prison for this offence and had been freed "early" in one of the prisoner releases following the original Olso agreement. The condition had been that he see out the remainder of his sentence confined to Jericho.

The border guards pursued Zakarneh to a crowded cafe in Qabatiya where, in retaliation, two members of Fatah's Black Panther military wing overpowered and then held them hostage. A fraught ten-hour stand-off ensued, involving mediation efforts by the PNA's West Bank Police Chief Haj Ismail Jabber, and the IDF's *Central Commander, Ilan Biran.* Yasser Arafat also personally intervened to get the guards released. The matter was eventually resolved with the release of the guards into Israeli custody. Both were immediately suspended from duty. Zakarneh and the two Panthers were taken to a PNA security court in Jericho where they received sentences of five and nine years "hard labour" respectively. "We will punish whoever disturbs the peace," said the PNA's Jericho Chief of Preventative Security, Jibril Rajoub. "There is one authority, one police force and it's their right to achieve security and good order." The IDF issued a statement saying it was satisfied with the PNA's actions and that "the redeployment would continue."

But satisfaction was hardly the mood of Palestinians in Jenin. On 30 November, two IDF reservists were wounded — one seriously — in an ambush on the Yabad-Shaked road, west of Jenin. No group has claimed responsibility, but, say sources, it is safe to assume that the attack was a response to the attempted arrest of Zakarneh.

Publicly, the PNA and Israel have accused traded accusations over the debacle. But privately senior Israeli military sources have leaked word that the arrest of Zakarneh was "a big screw*up". Zakerneh was clearly not a* threat to Israel's security in Jenin and any attempted apprehension should have been coordinated with the PNA, they say.

What the affair more likely signifies is dissension within Israel's security establishment over the speed and extent of redeployment, with the General Security Service (Israel's internal intelligence force) generally wanting quick progress and the IDF and Border Police desiring a slower pace, and perhaps no pace at all. Given this background, the arrests in Jenin were not about "security", but much more about inter-Israeli politics. It is a simmering turf war that could have potentially *lethal* consequences and not just for Palestinians.

No ticket for Hamas

Election fever may be in the air, but Hamas' spokesman in Jordan, Ibrahim Ghoshe, insists the Islamists will not be joining in. **Samia Nkrumah** in Amman sounds out the exiled leadership

Palestinians in the 16 constituencies of the West Bank and Gaza Strip will go to the polls on 20 January 1996 to elect an 83-member autonomy council as *well as an executive president.*

At least, some will. Others, including supporters of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine, will boycott the elections.

In an exclusive interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Ibrahim Ghoshe, the official spokesman for Hamas in Amman over the last five years, dismissed rumours that the Islamist movement would participate in the elections: "In its legislative and executive bodies, Hamas took the irrevocable decision to boycott the elections. Anyone who claims otherwise speaks for himself and not the movement," said Ghoshe.

"Over 4 million Palestinians, representing 70 per cent or two thirds of the population dispersed all over the world, will not be able to vote. How can we support these elections? There are over 5,000 prisoners, including 30 women, imprisoned under painful conditions. There are around 4,000 Islamists in prison. Many have gone on hunger strike," he added.

Speaking from the office of the Islamic Action Front bloc in Amman, Ghoshe said that Hamas emphatically rejects the Oslo I and II agreements between the PLO and the Israeli occupying forces and "*any of its tools, including* the elections". He believes that these agreements have given superficial self-rule to the Palestinian population without sovereignty, independence, self-determination or statehood. For Ghoshe, the elections will be run under the hegemony of the Israeli occupation and the elected council will not *have any real control* as its decisions will be subject to an Israeli veto.

At the same time, Hamas favours a democratic system, but under different conditions. "We are for fair elections which are free of political restrictions and which include Palestinians everywhere. We are prepared to support any *parliament elected* under free elections. But we believe that till today the international community has not given similar rights to Palestinians as were given to black South Africans before the election of Nelson Mandela," said Ghoshe.

Then why has Hamas agreed in principle to the formation of the National Islamic Salvation Party (NISP) at this critical moment? According to Ghoshe, there is no conflict. The NISP will not take part in the January elections. The confusion arose because the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) *has made it mandatory that* voters participating in municipal elections must also be included in the voters lists for the January elections. "A considerable number of the one million registered voters you heard about are Islamists and they will not vote in January but will do so in three months' time in the municipal elections."

Hamas has never rejected active participation in elections to syndicate bodies, chambers of commerce, municipalities, and other bodies that offer direct services to the Palestinian population, insisted Ghoshe.

The proposed party, whose official launch date remains unknown, will challenge the PNA to produce *tangible results from its* agreements with Israel. According to Ghoshe, the NISP will use popular and peaceful methods to serve the Palestinian population and will not be linked to armed resistance activities. Clearly though, its other function is to ensure that Hamas is not isolated from Palestinians in the self-rule areas and to minimise *the benefits the PNA may derive* from the elections in the short run.

The relationship between the PNA and Hamas is still an uneasy one, but attempts are being made to defuse tension "especially in Gaza due to the arrests and repression of leaders of the movement by the PNA. Fifty Hamas *leaders are in prison but* we are holding on to Palestinian national unity," said Ghoshe. He explained that this belief in the unity of the Palestinians encouraged Hamas to agree to hold talks with the PNA in Khartoum at the beginning of October.

Ghoshe said that Hamas subsequently sent two calls to Arafat to speed up *the dialogue* but despite the PLO leader's promise that the next meeting will be held in Egypt "so far no invitation has been forthcoming from Cairo". The delay doesn't appear to be accidental according to Ghoshe. "We've noticed a lack of enthusiasm from the PNA regarding the continuation of a dialogue and my hunch is that *the PNA brought* up the idea of a dialogue as propaganda to facilitate redeployment and elections," he said.

Many believe that after this month's redeployment and the January elections Arafat will be in a stronger position against the opposition, especially Hamas. "Don't forget that it is Rabin who re*quested this dialogue and it is he* who put pressure on the PLO to conduct the dialogue with us. However, in Rabin's absence the Zionist pressure on the PLO seems to have lost interest in dialogue," noted Ghoshe.

Ghoshe refuted reports that such contacts with the PNA are an in*dication that Hamas might con*sider ending its programme of active resistance to the Israeli occupation. Moreover, Hamas has cooperated with other opposition groups, namely the 10 factions which represent three main rejectionist trends based in Damascus: the Islamic, the leftist and the nationalists. They have issued *joint statements regarding the* boycott of the January elections. But admitted Ghoshe, "Hamas is not happy with the achievements of this coalition."

Yet rejectionism is only half the story. Can Hamas offer an alternative to the path being taken by PLO leader Yasser Arafat? According to Ghoshe, nothing is impossible, *the occupation is tem*porary even if it lasts for years. "You must not only think in decades, but in centuries. Look at the defeat of colonialism. The Arab and Islamic weaknesses are also temporary," he added.

Ghoshe contends that Rabin's assassination is a portent of things to come in Israeli society. "Our resistance has speeded up the rise of contradictions within the Israeli society, and these will develop further until they fragment their society," he predicted.

The Islamic resistance, Ghoshe maintains, is focused on fighting the Zionist occupation inside Palestinian territory but not beyond. *Hamas does not interfere* in the internal affairs of states. So far Hamas has offices in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan as well as Jordan. Ghoshe said that the movement has asked to have a political presence in Egypt as the latter has a great role to play in the Palestinian question, but so far this has not been possible.

Undoubtedly, *Hamas*'s close relations with the Islamic movements in the rest of the world could further its cause. But as Ziad Abu-Amr wrote in his book *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza* published in 1994 this could also be a liability. The Islamic movement "mainly in Jordan and Egypt *may for certain considerations* restrain the Islamic movement in the Occupied Territories. Since the Islamic groups in the West Bank and Gaza lack decision-making authority, especially with regard to strategic matters, these groups may have to abide by decisions that are taken outside the Occupied Territories. Such decisions would take into account not only factors that are at play in the Occupied Territories, but also the circumstances and the interests of the Islamic movement in the region as a whole."

An empty seat at the summit

This week's GCC summit in Muscat was not quite complete. But despite King Fahd's absence, the show rolled on. **Sherine Bahaa** looks at the summit's agenda

The absence of Saudi Arabia's King Fahd from the three day annual Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit seems to have provoked more comment than the meeting itself. As Mohamed El-Said Idris from Al-Khalij Strategic Centre in Sharjah described it, it is not a summit of "radical decisions".

King Fahd, a dominating force in Gulf Arab affairs and the architect of Saudi policies for the past two decades, was admitted to hospital in Riyadh last week. According to Saudi sources, doctors have advised him to rest to recover from work pressures, though rumours abound that the king has suffered a stroke.

Saudi Arabia, the world's *top oil producer* and exporter, is the largest GCC economy, has the biggest army and by far the biggest population in the *alliance. The group* also contains Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain.

Most of the summit's agenda was taken up with economic matters, but high on the list was security. The GCC, a regional alliance formed six months after the Iran-Iraq war broke out in September 1980, plans to boost an existing token joint defence force based in Saudia Arabia.

According to Idris, there is a growing support within the GCC for a unified military force or "Gulf shield". This time there is real coordination and military officials have laid out the first steps towards establishing a united Gulf force. It may not come to anything but, said Idris, the idea is there.

Terrorism, particularly of the radical Islamist kind will be another major issue, especially after last month's explosion in Riyadh. In its wake the *GCC states* are adopting strict *procedures* for getting exit or entry visas from or to the Gulf Arab states. Idris added that Saudi Arabia has *halted contracts with British companies* until the United Kingdom takes a tough stance towards opposition figures who have taken up refuge there.

Taha Abdel-Alim, of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, emphasised the economic aspects of Gulf security. The repercussions from the Gulf War are still being felt, not least by the Iraqi people who are bearing the brunt of five years of economic embargo. "There are two major factors which though not mentioned are nonetheless present," he explained. The first is the security bill paid by the GCC to the West, or more specifically to the US, in the form of buying weapons and paying the expenses for moving forces in and out of the region. The second is the fear of Iraq's return to the oil market which will have a negative impact on other oil producing countries, particularly the GCC. Abdel-Alim warned that a lower oil price will force Saudi Arabia to cut back on its oil production, with serious consequences for its already weakened economy.

There is growing support in the region for an easing of sanctions against Iraq. However, GCC *Secretary-General Sheikh Fahim Bin Sultan* Al-Qassimi said in a report to the summit that member states were committed to Iraq's implementation of all 1991 Gulf War related-UN resolutions.

Yet, several GCC states have already sent aid to the Iraqis, both quietly and publicly. According to Idris, there is an understanding among council members that a certain amount of flexibility is needed. "It was two summits ago that Qatar and Oman adopted a more lenient stance towards Iraq and they are ready to further develop it," he added.

Moreover, the call by President Sheikh Zayed of the United Arab Emirates for Arab reconciliation was not restricted to Iraq, commented Idris. It includes countries which allied themselves with Iraq during the war. In particular, there has been a marked improvement in Jor*danian-Kuwaiti relations.*

"It is as if a green light has been granted to those countries that want to deal with Iraq, with*out this being a commitment by the rest of the* council to adopt the same policy," Idris said. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, for instance, are firmly opposed to such moves.

Another crucial item on the agenda was the outcome of the latest talks between the GCC and its major trading partner, the European Union (EU). Attempts over the last few years to forge a free trade accord between the two blocs, which could open European markets to cheap petrochemical products from the region, have so far come to no avail. The EU is demanding the GCC take further steps towards harmonising their economies, including unifying customs duties.

A step in the right direction

By Ali Abdel-Karim

For four years, the language of dialogue in Algeria has ceded to the language of violence and in the process claimed over 50,000 Algerian lives. By any standards, this is a particularly high price to pay. It was against this backdrop that the call for national presidential elections was heard.

The tensions brought about by a feeble national economy and a rapid decline in the general standard of living were exacerbated by the ambiguity that characterised the transition to multi-party rule. The rapid creation of more than 75 political groupings that called themselves political parties, though the membership of some could be counted on the fingers of *both hands*, was a reflection of the fragility of this transition and an underlying weak grasp of the principles of democratic plurality.

There was no way Algeria could extricate itself from its predicament other than to hold national elections. Not to have followed this path would have only perpetuated the horrendous vicious circle and the despair engendered by years of futile wrangling among the belligerent forces that claim to represent the interests of the people.

The campaign itself was carried out in a mature and democratic environment. In practical terms, an appropriate electoral climate was engendered by ensuring equal media coverage for the parties and providing for the representation of the parties in the polling stations and on the independent national committee that monitored the elections. The presence of international observers also helped to guarantee the integrity of the electoral process.

Algeria's invitation to the Arab League to contribute a delegation to act as an independent observer demonstrated more than simply a desire to safeguard the integrity of the election process. Algeria, conscious of its position within the Arab World, seeks to bolster a regional approach to conflict resolution. The Arab League, for its part, was eager to participate. It saw the elections as the paramount *means for Algeria to avoid further agonies of* violence and destruction.

The mission took on special meaning for the Arab League. Previous Arab League experiences in Eritrea and Ethiopia had never been of this magnitude or so delicate and demanding. Political plurality is still relatively new in Algeria, and there was a considerable residue of mistrust from the turbulent period prior to the elections. It was thus essential for the league's delegation to carefully outline and pri*oritise its movements and contacts in a manner that* would best serve its goal of impartiality.

In truth, the response was overwhelmingly favourable. We were easily able to conduct lengthy and fruitful discussions with all political parties concerned and with the independent national monitoring committee. We were thus able to determine how the committee was composed and to ascertain the degree of its independence, its capacity to follow through on any complaints or queries and its general competence at carrying out its role to the approval of all the candidates and in accordance with the law governing the appropriate conduct of elections.

The need for impartiality also made it necessary for the Arab League delegation to hold discussions with the four candidates in order to acquaint itself as thoroughly as possible with their political platforms and the similarities and differences between them. It was important to solicit their opinions as regards the mistakes and breaches that had occurred during the campaign and which may have threatened the balloting process. These discussions clearly reflected the impression held by all concerned that the *occasional lapses did not occur by design and that* the candidates behaved in all respects in accordance with the electoral rules and procedures.

It goes without saying that the 16 November 1996 was an historic occasion. Those of us who had the good fortune to be present to watch the successive waves of voters were enthralled by the smiles and determination apparent on all the faces. There was an abundant cross section of the elderly, the young and women in all the balloting sites we visited. *Many images came to mind, but the lack of con*fidence that everyone had spoken of was nowhere in evidence. On that day, Algerian voters demonstrated that they understood that free and open elections are the alternative to coercion.

Because of precise planning, the voting centres were ready to open early. As soon as the international observers and the representatives of the candidates arrived, the voting began. The reports of the international observers from polling centres *around the country cited high voter turnout, smooth* voter processing, full compliance with the regulations and free and independent casting of ballots. There were no incidents of disturbance or unrest.

The stringent security precautions that prevailed during the balloting can be understood in light of Algeria's recent past. Given over four years of tension and bloodshed, one can understand why officials were so keen to reassure voters of their safety and the lack of compulsion.

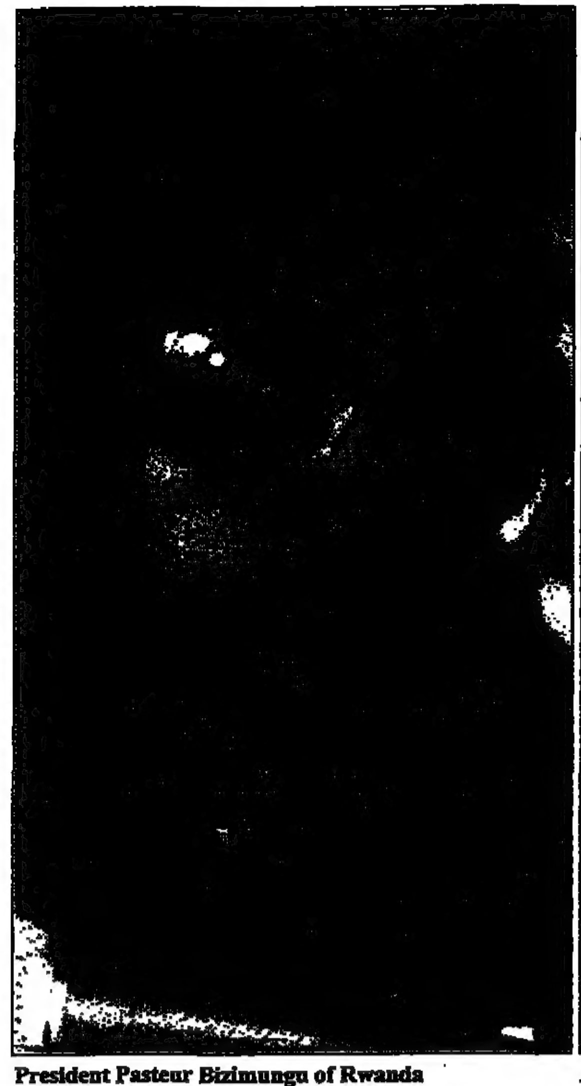
*This pioneering experience in the exercise of dem*ocratic plurality will leave its mark on the future of Algeria and its African and Arab environment. It will serve as a model for the procedures and regulations that should be observed during an election — down to the slightest detail. Algeria now anticipates the next and more important phase. I am confident that in the forthcoming stage, all parties involved will have gleaned the lessons of the election results and their effect both at home and abroad.

There may be no predicting how long the process of effecting such changes may take. What is certain, however, is that as long as the country perseveres in the pursuit of the language of dialogue in resolving its differences, effective and constructive changes will evolve. The elections of 16 November 1996 have given me grounds for optimism that respect for the free interchange of opinion has taken a foothold in Algeria.

The writer is assistant secretary-general of the Arab League and was head of the Arab League's observer team during the Algerian elections.

Al-Ahram Weekly
7 - 13 December 1995

President Pasteur Bizimungu is an extraordinary man heading a uniquely tortured country. He is an ethnic Hutu who heads a predominantly Hutu government that champions the rights of the ethnic Tutsi minority. His steadfastness and the impartiality of his public persona were instrumental in uniting his war-torn nation under a multi-ethnic coalition government. The psychological scars of war are all too apparent in his nation of nine million. The international community has unfortunately focused on peacekeeping as opposed to peacemaking. "The world has taken a back seat, closely monitoring military and political developments in Rwanda, and the entire Great Lakes region, without taking concrete steps to reconstruct the country's war-shattered economy and infrastructure," he remonstrated in an exclusive interview with Gamal Nkrumah





President Pasteur Bizimungu of Rwanda



A Rwandan boy wounded in the chest and head by sharpnel symbolises the agony of the traumatised nation *(photo: Reuter)*

Bizimungu's buzz words

What's the buzz? Reporters covering the African Great Lakes summit, convened *in Cairo last week, were looking for* clues as to the buzz words of the moment. Rwanda, a nation where only a year ago an unspecified number of people killed their compatriots in a cruel and systematic manner that made any onlooker's blood curdle, is still searching for answers to its many problems. Over 500,000 people perished and their surviving kith and kin demand justice.

Justice was Rwanda's President Bizimungu's buzz word. Foreign interference and intervention were other key words. "The genocide took place in the presence of the United Nations peacekeeping forces who incidentally had been put in place at the insistence of France and its allies against the choice of Organisation of African Unity (OAU) forces recommended by Rwandan progressive forces," President Bizimungu said.

Bizimungu was careful not to give the impression that Paris was making a pig's ear of its African policies. But Rwanda was not going to play pig in the middle as far as wrangling over American and French cultural *pre-eminence* was concerned. Like many in Rwanda's coalition government, led by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), Bizimungu is mindful of France's important traditional role as Rwanda's largest aid donor and biggest trading partner. France appears determined to give its economic prowess an even more prominent political dimension. But that does not mean that France calls the shots in the Rwandan capital Kigali.

Two million Rwandans were exiled to neighbouring Anglophone countries like Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Others further afield were in Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States. With many Anglophone RPF returnees assuming top posts in government and gobbling up business and predominating in the professions, Rwanda is about to do an about-face, or so it seems to France. Vital cultural and economic French interests are at stake.

President Pasteur Bizimungu was the only head of state attending the summit who was fluent in both English and French. Anglophone and Francophone reporters alike waited impatiently for the Rwandan president to bring them word of the goings-on in Rwanda. There were no words to describe the loss his people suffered, he said. There is much interference by foreign powers in the country's domestic politics and Rwanda's reconciliation process. The word was that France, together with some of Rwanda's African neighbours, would not leave the embittered country alone.

At the Cairo conference that brought together the presidents of Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Zaire, President Bizimungu concurred with former US President Carter that Rwanda was to request a three-month extension of the UN mandate scheduled to expire on 8 December 1995. President Bizimungu confirmed in Cairo that he would ask for an extension of the UN mandate, which begs the question why France — or the French media — has been prevaricating and disseminating misinformation.

"*Parti, partira pas*" (leaving, not leaving) ran a headline of the French daily *Le Soir* earlier this week. Radio France International announced that the Rwandan president had issued a statement ordering the UN peacekeepers to leave his country. The presidential plane flying Bizimungu back from the Cairo summit had not even touched down on the runway at Kigali's international airport when such French falsehoods were broadcast. "The French are sowing the seeds of confusion," warned an angry Rwandan official at the Cairo summit meeting.

The UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) also came under fire from President Bizimungu. "Rwanda needs technicians, doctors, agricultural experts, whereas UNAMIR is made up of soldiers," he said. "Does it make sense that $1 million a day are spent on the upkeep of the UN peacekeepers while roads are in deplorable conditions, and hospitals and schools are left derelict because of insufficient funds?" asked the Rwandan president.

UN peacekeepers were first dispatched to Rwanda in October 1993 to prevent the now ruling RPF from overrunning the country. They watched on as the former regime's *Interhamwe* militias of Hutu chauvinists butchered 500,000 — mainly Tutsi. By acting with pragmatism, curbing the strong urge to wreak vengeance on the perpetrators of the war crimes, the senseless violence and unadulterated brutality, Rwanda's RPF and President Bizimungu can teach a great deal to the world. Magnanimity is crucial, but meting out justice is of critical importance, too.

Rwanda's ambassador to Cairo, Ismail Amri Sued, who happens to be a Hutu and a Muslim, chipped in. "Rwanda is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country even though it has had a common culture and a national language — Kiryarwanda — for many centuries," he explained.

Sued denied reports that Rwanda opposed the extension of the UNAMIR. "President Bizimungu promised at the Cairo summit that he would extend the *mandate of the UN peacekeepers if that* would reassure the two million Rwandan refugees in neighbouring countries," he said.

Rwanda's Foreign Minister Anastase Gasana stated it loud and clear in a message to UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali this week: "Survivors of last year's genocide and massacres need tangible aid rather than the presence of soldiers." There are 1,200 UN peacekeepers stationed in Rwanda today, down from a peak of 5,500 in June 1994. But, "Rwanda's security is Rwanda's business," declared Gasana.

Pasteur Bizimungu was even more curt and uncompromising over the weekend before he left Cairo for Kigali at the end of the Carter Centre-sponsored summit meeting. "We do not want to heal [Rwandan] society at the expense of justice," he stated in an exclusive interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Bizimungu was categorical: "The perpetrators of genocide must be brought to justice." The process of healing the nation is of necessity a gruelling one and it begins with justice and reconciliation, Bizimungu *said.*

"We came to realise that to rebuild our nation and bring together the Rwandan people there must be nationwide reconciliation. There is no justice without reconciliation. And conversely, reconciliation is not possible without justice. Reconciliation means that we must consider both the offenders and the victims. We have to consider both the offenders' and the victims' respective pleas for mercy and justice. Reconciliation must not take place at any price. We must not be prejudiced against the victims' legitimate indignation. Yes, the offenders' pleas for mercy must be taken into account, but justice must not be meted out at the expense of the victims' legitimate concerns. Public indignation is running high in Rwanda today," Bizimungu said.

Bizimungu suggested that customary African law and traditional forms of justice be incorporated into the country's legal system to cater for the backlog of cases to be looked into. "Our legal system has completely broken down and we *are patiently rebuilding it.* We must not ignore justice. We do not want to create a precedent, because if we do then we will encourage others in the future to commit such atrocities again.

'Does it make sense that $1 million a day are spent on the upkeep of the UN peacekeepers while roads are in deplorable conditions, and hospitals and schools are left derelict because of insufficient funds'

"If we consider the classic form of justice it will take time and money. We need to heal the wounds of the nation and we must consider unconventional forms of justice," Bizimungu said. "At one time the population had moral leaders. We believe that there should be an alternative form of justice comprising traditional African forms of justice where [the focus] was not on punishment but was to reintegrate and rehabilitate the criminals," Bizimungu explained. "We must not do without justice by granting blanket amnesty to criminals."

Bizimungu denied claims by former Rwandan Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu that the ruling RPF had murdered in cold blood over 250,000 Hutu in revenge killings. "It is impossible that 1,000 people have been killed every day since we came to power. This is blatant propaganda," he said.

"We are committed to bringing the perpetrators of violence to justice," the Rwandan president said. "An international tribunal should be set up and some people will be put to trial and punished for the crimes they committed against humanity. The perpetrators of genocide must be brought to justice," he stressed.

"Justice is a must, but there is also the need to heal and stabilise society," Bizimungu said. "Real reconciliation involves all sections of society interacting and all interest groups participating in the peace process. That is why we established a government of national unity in Rwanda comprising different political forces. By justice we do not necessarily mean punishment. Three weeks ago Rwanda hosted an international seminar to discuss ways of implementing alternative forms of justice," he added.

"It is no mean achievement that three million internally displaced Rwandans plus the one million Rwandan nationals who had taken refuge in the [French-run] so-called Zone Turquoise have been resettled. Moreover, 1.5 million Rwandan refugees in neighbouring countries have so far been repatriated and resettled," President Bizimungu explained.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also came under fire from the Rwandan president. "The rate of repatriation would be even higher if the refugees were free to return to Rwanda voluntarily," Bizimungu said. "The presence of fugitives in the refugee camps abroad hinders their repatriation. Nevertheless, 3,257 members of the former government's forces have been reintegrated in the new army and the process continues as members of the rump army return to Rwanda. This week alone, 79 soldiers of the former regime returned," he disclosed.

"Before the April 1994 genocide there were over two million Rwandan refugees who for several decades had been denied their right to come home," Bizimungu explained. "Their predicament received very little international attention. Today, a similar number of refugees, who have been accorded unconditional return by my government, raise a lot of international attention. These double standards do not aim at ending the refugee problem but rather at perpetuating it for ulterior motives, hidden agendas and other interests," he said.

"There are two types of Rwandan refugees," said Bizimungu. "The 1959 refugees who were victims of exclusion and the 1994 refugees who were victims of manipulation. The new refugees are composed of two categories: the fugitives who planned and executed the genocide and the ordinary Rwandans who were scared away by the planners and perpetrators of the genocide," he added.

"So far the international community has been very generous. But [the bulk of] this aid has been channelled through NGOs [non-government organisations]. By and large, these NGOs are not coordinating their activities with the Rwandan government. We wish that more coordination existed between our government and the NGOs. We wish that the NGOs would have been more cooperative," he added. "German, British and Belgian aid has been forthcoming. America's USAID, too, played an instrumental role in the rehabilitation of the refugees and the reconstruction of Rwanda's infrastructure. We were paralysed because our economy was completely shattered," he said.

Bizimungu spoke of what he termed the "moral corruption of the church" in Rwanda. "This is a very delicate issue because the Roman Catholic church has been deeply involved in Rwandan politics in a partisan fashion. The church has taken part in genocide. The Roman Catholic church is not a neutral party. It has vested political interests. It was an active participant in the genocide. They deny their responsibility. But we uphold the message of the Bible to love one another. Some in the church are discouraging repatriation. In conjunction with UNHCR officials in neighbouring states they have plans to receive more refugees, instead of preparing people to return to Rwanda," Bizimungu said.

What about Rwanda's rickety relations with Kenya where many of the Rwandan fugitives from justice reside? Kenyan police have arrested large numbers of Rwandan refugees in the past few weeks.

It was former President Juvenal Habyarimana's death in a plane crash in April 1994 that sparked off the ethnic cleansing campaign instigated by Hutu chauvinists last year. Habyarimana's widow and many of his former hangers-on reside in Kenya today.

Kenya's President Daniel Arap Moi, a close personal friend of the late Habyarimana, has so far refused to cooperate with the UN international criminal tribunal set up to identify those responsible for the mass killings of Tutsi. "Local Kenyan newspapers reported that none of those arrested over the weekend were prominent suspects in the Rwandan genocide," Bizimungu told the *Weekly*.

And Zaire? "Zaire would have to put an end to intimidation in the camps," Bizimungu said. "We expect Zaire to give back the Rwandan assets it appropriated." But Bizimungu expressed satisfaction with the Cairo summit. He saw it as a good opportunity to meet Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seko, and said that they ironed out many of their differences. "The Cairo meeting with Mobutu was a success," he stressed.

"Genocide in Rwanda was prepared for political motives by authorities with the support and involvement of former colonial powers, notably France," the president said. "For centuries, Rwanda existed as a nation-state without division on the basis of ethnic or any other sectarian categories. Colonialism introduced racist theories and ideologies and practised discrimination. Ethnic divisions were designed, arbitrarily defined in contradiction of scientific evidence, and promoted according to the colonial policy of divide and rule," Bizimungu said. "The discriminatory policy which was pursued in the country during the colonial period created a culture of impunity that culminated in genocide and the massacres of April-July 1994."



Cotonou's call

FRENCH PRESIDENT Jacques Chirac (centre) flanked by his advisor on African affairs Fernand Wibaux (right) and President Nicephore Soglo of the Republic of Benin where the 1995 Francophone summit was convened this week. Rwanda was high on the *list* of topics discussed at the Francophone summit.

France is pinning its hopes for spearheading the 130 million-strong French speaking world's struggle to assert its presence on the international stage on the creation of the post of secretary-general of the Francophone world. The French-speaking community's most significant economic and political instrument is the Cultural and Technical Cooperation Agency (ACCT), *which marks its* 25th anniversary this year. The main beneficiaries of the ACCT, which has an annual budget of $86 million, are the French-speaking countries of Africa. For France, the fine line between political action and cultural activities are conveniently blurred.

France wields enormous political and economic influence in the African continent. But, many African heads-of-state attending the Francophone summit convened in Cotonou — the economic capital of Benin — are apprehensive about French plans to coerce African governments into adopting a French version of multiparty democracy.

(photo: AFP)

Paris's winter of discontent

In scenes reminiscent of the Paris 1968 student-worker revolt, France remains paralysed by strikes and demonstrations. Faiza Rady reviews the events leading up to a winter of discontent

Since Friday, 24 November French railway workers have been on nationwide strike, paralysing public transport and triggering massive traffic jams in urban centres as people use their cars to get to work. "In utter shambles" read the headline in the daily *Le Parisien*, describing the chaotic street scene, while the *Figaro* denounced the workers' "sabotage" of the public transport system.

Most papers indicated that there was no end in sight: "The strike strides ahead on its own momentum," said the tabloid *Info Matin*. Voting on the extension of their strike on a day-to-day basis, 180,000 workers for the national railway network, the SNCF, show no signs of relenting. And on Thursday 30 November, Paris bus and metro workers as well as electrical, gas and telephone employees joined in. Postal workers cut their services by 50 per cent, and union leaders are threatening to halt these vital services altogether. Meanwhile, professional unions are calling for air travel workers, teachers, journalists, police officers and public administrators to walk out of their jobs.

Across the board, workers are protesting at the government's intention to extend their pension contribution period from 37.5 to 40 years, as well as the proposed flat 0.5 per cent increase in the rate of income tax and projected social security slashes. Railway workers are the worst hit and, hence, the most militant. Formerly eligible for retirement with full benefits at the age of 50, they stand to lose their early pension plans. They are also threatened by increasing job insecurity since Prime Minister Alain Juppé plans to cut out losing railway lines. Moreover, privatisation looms ahead with further layoffs because Juppé intends to lease some lines to private companies. As a result of the strikers' militancy, the government has now offered to take over the company's deficit of 175 billion francs ($35 billion) and vaguely pledged to "respect" employees' pension rights. But the workers remain unconvinced. "We've had enough. Train workers have already lost 75,000 jobs in 10 years in the SNCF's modernisation," said union representative Bruno Dalberto.

For the workers, the most effective strike day so far was 24 November — "black Friday" — when five million workers joined in. Life came to a virtual standstill as people were unable to get to their jobs. In an atmosphere reminiscent of the May 1968 student-worker revolt, tens of thousands demonstrated in several cities in support of the strikers. In Paris, the underground system operated at three per cent capacity and all services on suburban trains were cancelled. Civil aviation officials reported that domestic and international flights were reduced by 84 per cent. Even health workers went on strike and hospitals only operated emergency services. Paris newspapers stopped publication, municipal post offices closed and many workers of the public electricity and phone companies also joined the strike.

In the past three weeks, this was the third one-day strike protesting the new austerity measures. A 10 October walkout by government workers demonstrating against a wage freeze similarly left much of the country paralysed, and a 14 November strike by rail and underground workers caused major traffic blockages all over the country.

These strikes were followed by the 21 November militant student rally, sponsored by all student and teacher unions that mobilised more than 100,000 high-school and university students. Angry at the chronic underfunding of education, they demanded an emergency two billion francs ($400 million) bail-out fund, backed by legislation determining budget allocations. The students denounced a shortage of professors and overcrowding in the different departments, demanding the creation of 6,000 teaching positions and an emergency plan to provide new buildings. They said that substandard university education was limiting their employment prospects in an increasingly competitive market.

The young are particularly hard hit by unemployment: 850,000 jobless youths under 25 are collecting compensation, another 380,000 temporarily work on subsidised job-trainee programmes and 320,000 are on short-term contracts. Nationwide, 500 neighbourhoods housing approximately three million people are considered "sensitive zones" where crime and drug trafficking are rampant because of extreme poverty. In such zones, youth unemployment is estimated at 24 per cent for men and 31 per cent for women. The system of education fosters growing social inequalities by using rigid, class-based criteria to admit a select group of students to the prestigious *grandes écoles* — the training ground for the country's future elites. Since the 1950s, the proportion of working-class students admitted to such schools has decreased from 29 per cent to the current 8.6 per cent. Fully aware of the scores, none of the recent presidential candidates dared address young voters with the conventionally optimistic youth campaign clichés.

Yves Dupont, head of the sociology department at the University of Caen, commented: "We work in deplorable conditions, in lecture halls with no microphones, dirty offices and a library with 12 chairs." The students also demanded that foreign and French students be treated equally and rejected the US-modelled privatisation drive. Student representatives requested the immediate nationalisation of the private "Pasqua" faculty as well as the posh, newly-built Leonardo da Vinci Institute, and their incorporation into the Sorbonne. "We want money, not private or underdeveloped universities," the students chanted. "They pour billions into the army to blast some bombs in Polynesia and nothing for us," said Felix Cau, a 20-year-old history student, referring to French nuclear testing in the South Pacific.

The government's austerity measures, strongly supported by financial markets, aim to eliminate the social security debt of 250 billion francs ($51 billion) as well as the social security department's annual deficit of 64 billion francs ($13 billion). Moreover, the country's receding economic growth — recent estimates indicate a one per cent annual growth rate — seems to lend credence to the conservative government's tight fiscal policies and Jacques Chirac's self-righteous stand. "Pressure groups have become inordinately important in this country, to the extent that one can't touch anything without them screaming their heads off," Chirac said. "I don't give a damn. I have seven years. It is during my term in office that France will adjust to the year 2000. Let the pressure groups scream and demonstrate all they want."

Despite the French president's apparent confidence, the majority of the people reject the government's policies. A 22 November opinion poll showed that 60 per cent consider the social security cuts "unbearable", 73 per cent expressed pessimism about the future and 64 per cent believed that austerity measures unjustly burden the poor. A case in point: while Juppé spoke about eradicating social inequities by "asking privileged groups to help the disadvantaged", he proposed to increase pension payments and delay the average workers' retirement by two and a half years. Yet his proposal failed to include government officials, who can retire with full pensions and fringe benefits after only five years of public service.

In effect, governments of the right and left have progressively dismantled the welfare state by adopting economic neo-liberal policies over the past two decades. In France, like elsewhere, the market economy determines a growing social disparity as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Hence 17 million people control 80 per cent of all assets, while another 17 million only hold 1.2 per cent. Since the mid-'80s when the Socialist government started denationalising corporations and eliminating protective trade controls, many multinationals have relocated their production lines. Operating according to the optimal profit motive, subsidiaries moved to eastern European countries that offer the least restrictive legislation and the cheapest unprotected skilled labour pool — the cost of an east European worker is 10 to 20 times lower than his western counterpart. Moreover, companies that do not relocate renege on their contracts, reducing workers' salaries and health benefits. Currently, 1,400,000 jobs are at risk because of projected plant closures, relocation as well as increased plant computerisation.

Unemployment rates have soared from three per cent in the early '70s to the current 12 per cent, and by 1994, close to one million of the structurally unemployed had become welfare recipients.

When ignorance kills

World AIDS Day 1995 brought little reassurance that the world will face the new millennium with changed attitudes, writes Jihan Ammar

When Rhena Ndagga, a 25-year-old Ugandan living in Britain, discovered her lover was leaving her for another woman, she took the matter into her own hands. The HIV-positive woman injected her lover with her own blood, an act which a British court ruled "was deliberate, calculating and cruel". On 1 December, World AIDS Day, the court sentenced Ndagga to two years in jail on charges of "causing grievious bodily harm with intent" and recommended that she be deported.

Ndagga's native Uganda has been one of the countries most devastated by AIDS since the disease first reared its head in Africa over a decade ago. Her adopted home is faring somewhat better. In fact, British lawmakers decided that indications that the spread of AIDS and HIV, the virus which causes the fatal disease, was slowing among the population, were a strong enough reason to freeze the health service's special allocation for AIDS. Waning numbers dubiously replace preventative measures in this scenario.

Recent research shows that the projected spread of the virus among homosexual and bisexual men in Britain has fallen by seven per cent. And among the country's heterosexuals, the projected increase in cases is less than half the increase estimated only two years ago. France has three times as many AIDS cases as Britain, and Spain seven times as many. But the margins of success in the battle against AIDS remain narrow. Such small percentages may inspire government ministers to re-budget national funds, but the larger issues surrounding AIDS and HIV still haunt a world spinning towards a new millennium.

Britain's freeze on resource funds was announced on the eve of World AIDS Day. The following day, the UK Forum on HIV and Human Rights issued a report stressing that public health was threatened by discrimination against people with HIV and AIDS. According to the forum, stigmas are propelling the spread of the virus by making it difficult for individuals to acknowledge their infection and ensure others are protected.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) offered little consolation in this regard. The organisation estimates more than 14 million adults worldwide have AIDS or HIV — eight million men and six million women. By the year 2000, it is expected that 30 to 40 million people will have been infected. Currently 11 million people in Africa are infected and three million in Asia. WHO predicts that, by the year 2000, the annual number of new HIV infections in Asia will exceed those in Africa.

"HIV continues to spread at the rate of 6,000 infections a day — above all in the developing world," said Dr Peter Piot, a Belgian physician who is executive director of the UN specialised agency for AIDS, UNAIDS. Such high rates of daily infections are especially chilling for Asia, a continent which is home to two of the world's most populous nations — India and China.

In Mandarin Chinese, AIDS means the sickness which comes from love. Love and drug addiction often go hand in hand, and AIDS is sweeping through the country's large population of intravenous drug users. Official reports say there are 2,428 cases of HIV infection nationwide but health officials privately estimate that China has as many as 100,000 cases.

China's Minister of Health, Chen Minzhang, warned that AIDS cases seriously threaten the world's most populous nation of 1.2 billion people. This year, the state media launched an unprecedented public education drive. Chinese officials have warned that the tiny number of AIDS cases could quadruple in the next decade through HIV contamination of a largely unscreened blood supply.

More fuel to the fire is the fact that by the time condoms arrived, birth control in China was practised through Intra-Uterine Devices (IUD) and sterilisation; a tide of HIV cases had already streamed through the country's brothels. The epidemic is moving fast through Ruili, home to a large number of prostitutes. In the last two years, public health officials in Ruili have refused to discuss the local rate of infection, which is said to be the highest in the country.

Though the centre of the AIDS storm is shifting east, Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, is still grappling with over a decade of devastation. The end of civil war in Mozambique and the re-opening of trade routes with the region has facilitated the spread of AIDS in a country once fairly isolated by the throes of civil war. A mass return of refugees from neighbouring countries with higher infection rates has also increased the incidence of infection.

However, the number of reported cases rarely reflects the probable number of people infected with HIV. In much of the continent, the AIDS plague is linked to war. Civil war in Rwanda prompted the spread of the disease when ethnic Hutu militiamen, said to have an infection rate near 50 per cent, used rape as a weapon of war.

Kenya marked World AIDS Day with the announcement that AIDS is leaving behind a country of orphans. According to Health Minister Joshua Angatia, the number of AIDS orphans is expected to double to 600,000 by the turn of the century. Angatia said the government was hard pressed to provide hospital care to victims of the incurable disease and the future increase would place a huge social and economic burden on the government. Health educators in Kenya say the main problem is a lack of behavioural changes. Addressing a national World AIDS Day gathering, Kenyan Agriculture Minister Simeon Nyachae told a predominantly rural audience that abstention from casual sex was the best prevention for AIDS.

The country reports issued on World AIDS Day signalled more than just growing numbers of a thus far incurable epidemic. Behind the numbers lie evidence that the stigmas surrounding HIV and AIDS remain the same. AIDS is still being addressed with shame. "The fight against AIDS must be seen as a problem of national security, threatening the vital interests of society and state," boomed Mikhail Markevich, head of the Russian Health Ministry's infectious disease department.

Arkady Yesinsky, head of department of Russia's state AIDS inspectorate, told a news conference last Friday that Russia was lucky that AIDS had appeared later there than in other countries and had just 185 registered cases. It is still taboo in Russian society to broach such subjects as condoms, known as galoshes because of the thick rubber from which they were once made. Fuelling the myth that AIDS is somebody else's problem, a controversial regulation requiring long-term visitors to Russia to prove that they do not have HIV has almost been completed.

UNAIDS Director Piot spoke of legal rights on World AIDS Day, the theme of which was "Shared rights, shared responsibilities". The message here is that AIDS is still everyone's problem.

Breakthrough or fudge?

The British and Irish prime ministers have agreed to step up peace efforts, but the thorny issue of arms decommissioning could still derail the reconciliation process, reports Doaa El-Bey from London

British Prime Minister John Major and his Irish counterpart, John Bruton, have agreed to set their differences aside and accelerate the twin-track policy that will allow them to launch preliminary talks on the future of Northern Ireland. The two governments sent official invitations earlier this week for the talks, which, it is hoped, will pave the way for all-party peace talks in February.

The two leaders left the thorniest issue — the decommissioning of arms — to the international committee established a few months ago to speed up progress towards all-party peace talks.

The accord came a few hours before US President Bill Clinton's visit to England and Northern Ireland last week. The visit, the first by an American president to Northern Ireland, was aimed at shunting the peace process out of its present deadlock.

Although Clinton hailed the agreement as a breakthrough that brings "hope and strength to all those who struggle for peace around the world", it still faces a number of obstacles.

Neither Major nor Bruton have changed their positions on decommissioning. Their difference of opinion has stalled the peace process for the last few months and led to the abrupt cancellation of talks between the two in September. Immediately after their meeting last month, Major declared that he still insisted that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) give up some weapons as a precondition for all-party talks. Bruton, in turn, reiterated his stance that the handover of any IRA arms was not a feasible objective at this stage.

The decisions of the international committee, which holds the responsibility of resolving the conflict in Northern Ireland, are not binding. The committee, which is headed by the popular American Senator George Mitchell, is scheduled to present a report to the British and Irish governments in mid-January. If it resolves that the parties should start talks before the IRA gives up some of its weapons, Major is unlikely to accept its decision.

Armed conflict erupted in Northern Ireland in 1969 and raged for 25 years until the IRA concluded a ceasefire agreement in August 1994. Loyalists followed suit two months later.

Although the long-awaited agreement between Major and Bruton has been hailed as a breakthrough by some parties in Northern Ireland, others have received it coldly or even criticised it.

The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) welcomed the accord as an extremely positive step and stated that it thought February was a realistic date for starting all-party talks. Councillor Alex Edward of the SDLP told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the accord and Clinton's subsequent visit gave everybody the opportunity to support peace. "Parties can now come to the negotiating table exactly like the Israelis and the Palestinians did," he said.

Contrary to other parties which believe that decommissioning is a precondition for all-party talks, Edward believes that the biggest problem is to get people to speak to each other and build mutual trust. "The real problem is not the bombs in the hands but the bombs in the minds. Even if the parties that possess weapons gave up 10 per cent, or even 50 per cent, of their weapons, they could get them back again," he said.

"The loyalists and the republicans declared that they would not go back to war and that they were committed to peace. Decommissioning necessitates debate and dialogue to reach an agreement," he added.

Unexpectedly, Sinn Fein, which has criticised the government for hindering all-party talks, received the news of the accord somewhat coolly. Sinn Fein's Gerry O'Hara told the *Weekly* that although Clinton's visit had added a new, positive ingredient to the process, his party was still reviewing the outcome of the accord and would further discuss it in a meeting this week or early next week.

He reiterated Sinn Fein's reservations about the accord, pointing out that it had not changed the stand of the British government. "Major came out of the meeting with Bruton to declare that he is still holding decommissioning as a precondition to all-party talks," he said.

O'Hara confessed, however, that the date set by the British and Irish governments to start the talks was realistic in the reckoning of Sinn Fein. "We declared, together with the Irish government and the nationalists, that we were ready to enter all-party talks immediately. We have been waiting for that step for the last 15 months. It is now the turn of the British government and the unionists to show their commitment to all-party talks," he said.

The unionists were furious about the accord and described it as a fudge because it ignored decommissioning. Ian Paisley, head of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), denigrated the agreement as being "a matter of semantics. They want to put something for Bill Clinton; so there is no real agreement. They're putting on a good show so that Clinton can come here and say Bosnia on Monday, Ulster on Thursday, what a good boy I am," he jeered.

The leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), David Trimble, described the accord as distasteful. "We had all this rushing about ... so that John Major could meet President Bill Clinton and say I've done what you told me to do. Isn't that a shameful position for a British prime minister to be reduced to," he said.

Time will prove whether this accord will lead to further agreement and eventually to all-party talks or to another deadlock. Are those whom Clinton described as "people who deep down inside will never be able to give up the past" going to derail the peace process?

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

Bill's mettle

By James Zogby

President Bill Clinton's decision to commit US troops to Bosnia is a courageous act of leadership. It is also a risky political move that may have a major impact on the future of his presidency.

Clinton inherited the crisis in Bosnia at the beginning of his term in January 1993. During the '92 campaign, then-candidate Clinton had been strongly critical of President Bush's lack of resolute action to stop the slaughter and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. Clinton's first chairman of the joint chiefs-of-staff, Colin Powell — a holdover from the Bush administration — continued to oppose direct US engagement in Bosnia during the first period of the Clinton administration.

When in 1993 President Clinton did announce his intention to arm the Bosnians and strike at Serbian positions and sent Secretary of State Warren Christopher to Europe to build support for the move, he ran into a new obstacle: the reluctance of the US's NATO allies to support this policy which they believed would aggravate the conflict and endanger the peacekeeping forces stationed throughout the region.

As a result, the president found himself in a bind. The continuing tragedy in Bosnia tore at the conscience of America, but without European support the US could not act. And so the nightmare continued.

Earlier this year the crisis in Bosnia came to a head. After Serbia overran two UN-protected safe areas in eastern Bosnia and perpetrated new atrocities against Bosnian Muslims, the US took strong action and struck forcefully at Serbian military positions. In the western part of Bosnia, the Bosnian-Croatian alliance — formed earlier this year with the assistance of US mediation — turned the tide against the Bosnian Serb forces and gained control of large areas of the country.

It was this turn of events that moved the Serbs to the peace table. Four months of negotiations in the region and three weeks of intense talks in Dayton, Ohio, finally produced a peace agreement signed by the presidents of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia.

On paper the agreement has many positive elements. If fully implemented, it will retain the unitary Bosnian state and may, in the long run, restore harmony to the deeply divided country. But there are many "ifs" that must be considered. Above all, the success of the agreement will depend on the ability of the three leaders to control their constituents. If radical elements of any side break the restraint of the leaders, the conflagration could reignite.

Essential to maintaining the peace in the interim period is the presence of the NATO peacekeeping force whose role it will be to assist the parties to implement the agreement that they signed. US participation in the leadership of that NATO force will be the key to the success of the peacekeeping mission.

The decision to commit US troops as part of a peacekeeping mission is indeed a risky gamble for Clinton, but one which he could not avoid. As disturbing as the Bosnian situation has been to the president and the American people, and as dangerous as a renewed and expanded war in the former Yugoslavia might be, the president realised that even higher stakes were at risk. If the US failed in its responsibility to provide leadership in a vital NATO mission in Europe, the impact on US-European relations would cause incalculable damage to US credibility and leadership worldwide.

So, despite the dangers of engagement, Clinton made his courageous decision to act — to provide the diplomatic muscle necessary to secure an agreement and to provide the military might needed to implement it.

If the waters in Bosnia are dangerous, the political currents in the US can only be described as treacherous. And with only one year before the 1996 presidential elections, the president is taking an enormous risk in confronting the isolationist sentiment that is particularly strong on the Republican far right.

With the exception of senators Bob Dole of Kansas and Richard Lugar of Indiana, the other six Republican candidates for the presidency have blasted Clinton's decision to send US troops to Bosnia. They have been joined by the radio talk show hosts who are popular among grassroots Republicans.

The rhetoric against the president is extremely harsh, but it has nonetheless found support among those in the US public fearful of losing American lives in a foreign war they don't understand.

To their credit, Dole and Lugar seem to understand what is at stake, not only for the authority of the presidency, but for US political leadership in NATO and the world. They have been joined by other thoughtful Republican analysts and by the overwhelming majority of newspaper editorial writers nationwide.

But the analysis of US interests is not as great a mobilising force as isolationist fear. Congressmen are reporting hundreds of letters and calls to their offices, 90 per cent of which are against sending US troops to Bosnia. And so the White House has gone all out to mobilise public support for the president's decision. On a level equal to the campaign to secure passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the White House staff are working around the clock to turn the tide of public opinion.

The president's compelling speech to the nation on 27 November began to turn the tide. On the day before the speech public opinion was opposed to the participation of US troops in Bosnia by a margin of 52 to 36 per cent. After the speech, that shifted to 46 to 40 per cent in favour of US involvement.

The narrow margin must be expanded and then translated into pressure on Congress to support the president. While the administration feels hopeful that the more deliberative and responsible Senate will understand US interests and support the president, changing the mind of the House of Representatives — dominated by newly elected members — will be more difficult. In late October and early November in two separate votes, Congress passed non-binding resolutions overwhelmingly opposing the introduction of US troops in Bosnia. One vote passed by a margin of 315 to 103.

The president has the authority and the determination to send US troops with or without specific congressional authorisation. But, as we have seen in the past, congressional and public support is critical to sustain the mission, especially if, as expected, it proves to be a difficult one.

That is why the White House is so engaged in building public support for this move and why the administration must remain engaged in sustaining public support during the coming months.

It is ironic to some that President Clinton, who was elected in 1992 as a president with a "sharp as a laser" focus on the domestic economy, has come to risk his presidency on the success of a difficult foreign policy mission.

Clinton has learned the lesson of world leadership. The US cannot be an economic power and reap the benefits of an interdependent world economy if it does not continue to play a leadership role in the world's political affairs.

Bosnia may be a dangerous mission with serious domestic consequences for the president, but failure to act would have been more dangerous and more damaging to US interests worldwide.

The writer is president of the Washington-Based Arab American Institute.

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

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A 70-year span of the 19th century saw the rise, bloom and decline of government-funded Egyptian educational missions to Europe. Shortly after Britain occupied Egypt in 1881, it began reducing these missions, particularly to France, in order to curtail French cultural influence. But wealthy private individuals and organisations defied British policy. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizq** tells the story as gleaned from the pages of *Al-Ahram*



Zaghloul, Mubarak, Ismail, Tahtawi, Cromer

Much has been written about Egypt's educational missions to Europe in the 19th century. Some scholars have obtained high academic degrees for their studies on the subject. Nevertheless, these writings only tell us part of the story.

These sources tell us that the government began sending educational missions to Europe in the era of Mohamed Ali. There was an approximately 20-year hiatus from the end of Mohamed Ali's reign until the beginning of the rule of his grandson, the Khedive Ismail. By the end of Ismail's reign, this activity began to ebb once more, largely due to the constraints of the financial crisis of the period. With the beginning of the British occupation in 1881 it was systematically curtailed.

From the outset, the purpose of the educational missions was to serve the needs of the modern state that Mohamed Ali had founded and which Ismail extended and amplified. The purpose was to generate the technical expertise required by the new military establishment created by Mohamed Ali and by the civilian establishment that emerged under Ismail. Thus, while under the former ruler, educational missions focused on military sciences, mathematics, medicine, engineering, navigation and ship building, under the latter ruler, the focus shifted to the humanities, and notably to public administration and law. There was a corresponding shift in the educational environment that reflected the aims and priorities of the two systems. The harsh militaristic regimentation and discipline that characterised student life under Mohamed Ali was no longer appropriate to the more liberal age of Ismail.

The missions, particularly at first, comprised primarily members of the Turkish aristocracy. But, they also included some native Egyptians, many of whom acquired great repute. Rifa'a Tahtawi, Ali Mubarak and Mohamed Bayoumi are among the illustrious figures to emerge in this epoch. On the other hand, one mission had so many sons of the ruling family itself, that it acquired the name "the scions' mission." That this, like most educational missions, was sent to France, was largely due to the influence of the numerous French experts engaged by Mohamed Ali in the first half of the 19th century. It also explains why French became the language of the educated elite in Egypt.

As for the rest of the story, this we can glean from the many references to the educational missions that appeared in *Al-Ahram* in the late 19th century. The dates 1813 and 1885 are landmarks. In 1813, Egypt sent its first "scientific mission" to Italy to acquire the military arts, engineering and the technology of printing. The year 1885 represents a turning point in education in Egypt in general. This was the year when the British began to implement their policy of eliminating the free educational system that had prevailed until then. Although Lord Cromer has written that the process of abolishing state-subsidised education had begun a decade earlier, in 1874, when the government of Riad Pasha began to cut back appropriations in response to the country's economic crisis, 1885 remains the critical year for foreign educational missions. In the 70 year interval between 1813 and 1885, many cultural, economic and political factors would influence the course and nature of educational missions.

One major factor was a shift in the priorities of British colonial educational policy, when the authorities decided to limit secondary and higher education and focus on primary education. The name Douglas Dunlop, the advisor to the Ministry of Education, is perhaps the most closely associated with this policy, which would culminate in the battle between the Quranic schools (*Al-kuttab*) and the university in the first decade of the 20th century. The occupation authorities wanted to expand the base of primary Quranic schools, in order to co-opt the teachers of these schools who were a major factor of the developing national movement. It was only natural that this development would affect the course of higher education and the subsequent levels of study abroad. Finally, the purpose of the policy was to reduce French cultural influence and augment the British cultural influence. Curtailing the missions to France was an inherent product of this.

Perhaps the narrative one follows in *Al-Ahram* during the latter half of 1885 illustrates the origins of the British policy. In August we read, "The exalted government has resolved to withhold the dispensation of the allocations granted for the education of a group of Egyptian youths in Paris and instead has allocated a smaller sum to educate them in other European capitals." Given *Al-Ahram*'s partiality to French culture, one is not surprised to read, "It is the hopes of this newspaper that such reports are inaccurate."

On 19 August, the newspaper published a lengthy report on "the sums allocated yearly to send Egyptian students to France." The purpose of the article was to demonstrate that the government's intention was to cut down costs. Primarily, it would save 67,000 francs a year — the salary paid to the mission's supervisor and administrator while abroad — by dispensing with this government representative. However, different objectives of the policy became apparent through other allocations. For example, it was decided to dispatch the fees for each student — 25,000 francs — directly to the principal of the school abroad. The effect of this decision was to dissolve the mission as a permanent organisation and transform the role of the government into an agency that granted funds to students on an individual basis, solely for the stipulated period of their education. Prime Minister Nubar confirmed this trend when he announced that "the students should not be assembled at a single school, but rather distributed among several schools."

Two further stipulations are equally, if not more revealing of the government's intention to suspend educational missions abroad. The requirement, "that no student should exceed 12 years of age," virtually makes a mockery of the system that had previously existed, particularly since the average age must have been much higher. Rifaa Tahtawi was over 25 when he went abroad in 1826 and Ali Mubarak was at least 21 when he joined his educational mission in 1844. The second stipulation was that "the children of wealthy families will not be entitled to government educational subsidies for study abroad, but rather these funds shall be allocated to the children from poor families who display the appropriate talent and dedication." Although on the surface, the decision appears to institute a form of social justice, in reality it reflected the inclination of the Ministry of Education to stop sending children abroad at the government's expense at all.

The Council of Ministers which took these decisions, proceeded further to delude Egyptian public opinion by announcing that it would send an additional five children a year, over and above the current quota, in order to study medicine and veterinary science. Evidently, *Al-Ahram* itself was duped, in spite of the obvious contradictions between this decision and the previously mentioned stipulations. It announced, "The government has not annulled the Paris mission, rather it has augmented it and we find in these decisions proof of the honourable Nubar Pasha's concern for improving the conditions of the mission and we thank him for his consideration."

The following days would demonstrate that *Al-Ahram*'s gratitude was unmerited. The Egyptian government sent one of its senior French officials, Mogille Bey, the director of Al-Muallimin Teachers' School, to France "as our representative in the French Ministry of Education". It soon became apparent that the man was on a very specific mission: to terminate Egypt's largest educational mission abroad, the French mission.

Conversely, the Egyptian Ministry of Education seemed to want to encourage study in England. It announced in 1889 that it had selected a grammar school in Portsmouth. "Whomsoever wishes to send their children to this institution should inform the ministry and pay 150 pounds per year for the tuition fees as well as the travel expenses." Clearly the ministry was well on its way to halting payment for educational missions abroad.

While the government was pushing in one direction, social conditions were pushing in the other. Seventy years of experience with educational missions had created a general conviction of the value this had in terms of social advancement. Study abroad was the key to many important government positions. There also emerged during that interval a new class of large and middle landowners with the financial resources to commit to their children's education. For them, the path to marrying their fortunes with the centres of power was to guarantee that their children acquired the appropriate academic qualifications to enable them to occupy influential administrative posts.

Perhaps the following four items from *Al-Ahram* of August and September 1887 illustrate the extent of concern for family-funded education:

"Haroun Effendi, the elder son of Soliman Bey Moussa, has passed his exams in law in Paris and obtained a certificate to attest his success and excellence in his field."

"The intelligent scholar, Mohamed Bey Nash'at, son of Ahmed Pasha Nash'at, has travelled to Geneva in Switzerland to acquire the sciences in the Hakious School."

"Mohamed Helmy Bey, son of the late Hassan Pasha El-Tobgi and Youssef Bey Sadiq, son of the late Ismail Pasha Sadiq, have obtained their secondary school certificate and it is now their intention to travel to Europe to join the Montpellier School of Law."

"Habib Effendi Khayat of the illustrious Khayat family in Assiut has recently arrived in the capital on his way to London to complete his education in medicine."

The transition from government-sponsored to privately-funded education abroad left its mark on the recipients, as we can observe in *Al-Ahram*. By 1895, there was only one officially government sponsored student abroad. The ministry of education's role had virtually ended. Meanwhile, new forces were beginning to emerge. The Khedive Abbas II took advantage of the situation to extend his influence among the young and rising educated elite of the wealthy families and to mobilise them against the British occupation. We thus learn from *Al-Ahram* of 20 June 1893, "The Khedive has declared that he intends to send the two top students to complete their studies in Paris at the expense of His Royal Highness." The private associations that began to proliferate in the 1890s also played an important role in filling the vacuum created by the Ministry in the field of further education. The Islamic Charity Association, the Coptic Tawfiq Association as well as certain government institutions that required particular training established special programmes. For example, the newspaper reports, "The Railways Authority intends to send five of the most prominent students to Europe, where they will spend one year in Switzerland, a year in France and a year in England in order to acquire a thorough knowledge of the railway systems of these countries, whereupon they will return to Egypt for employment with the railway authority."

There were many cases of individuals who went abroad in order to enhance their occupational qualifications in order to compete more effectively with the growing numbers of professionals at home. The most notable instance is the famous revolutionary leader, Saad Zaghloul, who was 40 years old in 1896 when he went to Paris to obtain his doctorate from the Sorbonne. There were numerous other instances. On 6 March 1891 we read, "The eminent physician, Dr. Asaad Effendi Sameh who has served in the government medical corps for 15 years, had travelled to Paris for a four-year course in the various branches of ophthalmology, after which he obtained the highest attestations to his knowledge and skill." A second article, appearing five months later, informs the reader of the return to Egypt of Dr. Shafie Bey, "after having completed his studies of law and obtained a certificate attesting to his merits." It goes on to mention that Dr. Shafie "who is completely versed in the medical sciences and who is an experienced practitioner, decided to travel to Paris where he began as a complete novice in the study of law and continued until he excelled in all its aspects and received the diploma bearing testimony to his excellence."

But even in the domain of privately-financed education abroad the government tried to interfere. Several news items inform us that certain administrations had refrained from appointing graduates from French institutions, thus threatening the social and professional aspirations of those who desired to pursue their further education in France. Others were lured home before completing their study by offers of jobs. On 26 December 1894, we read that the Ministry of Interior recalled 10 law students who had been studying in Paris. We then learn that the Ministry of Justice called for the "termination of educational missions to France for the study of law". That this branch of studies was specifically targeted is no surprise. These students comprised the corps of anti-British political activity. 1895 was the watershed. Monsieur Felix Faure, known for his pro-Egyptian sympathies, had just been elected president of France. The Egyptian students studying there at the time wrote him a letter in which they said, "The Egyptian question is the subject of intense debate and we eagerly yearn for a rapid solution. We observe that all eyes in Egypt are directed toward this great and friendly nation with the hopes that it will hasten the hour of Egypt's deliverance from British occupation." On 4 February, the president received a delegation of Egyptian students in the Elysée Palace. *Al-Ahram* was present on that fateful day. It announced the meeting in bold print and then, in an extensive front page article, it proceeded to defend the students. "Futile Threat" was the title of the commentary submitted by the famous nationalist, Mustafa Kamel, then writing under the pen name, "A Loyal Egyptian". He first responded to allegations in the occupation press that the students were "arrogant and impetuous." People should not be surprised that Egyptians turned to France, because "she has proved time and again that she is the patron of liberty and the champion of independence." He concluded by warning the occupation authorities that "their wrath against the demonstrators in France will only encourage more widespread demonstrations and increase the number of Egyptians complaining to Europe against them."

It was not long before Mustafa Kamel's prediction came true. In a meeting of the French parliament in June that year, Kamil presented a painting "depicting the Egyptian people pleading for the assistance of France, the liberator of nations and people." According to *Al-Ahram*'s description, the painting portrayed France "with eyes cast down in mournful compassion and with a hand extended to receive a petition submitted to it by the Egyptian nation, represented by a group of Egyptians of every sort, beneath the Egyptian national flag." At the bottom of the picture, the newspaper continues, "is a lion crouched to pounce, its eyes emitting sparks, and next to it a half naked man wearing a British hat and carrying a sharpened sword." According to many, the picture represents the birth of the new Egyptian national movement which was effectively founded by the Egyptian student missions abroad.



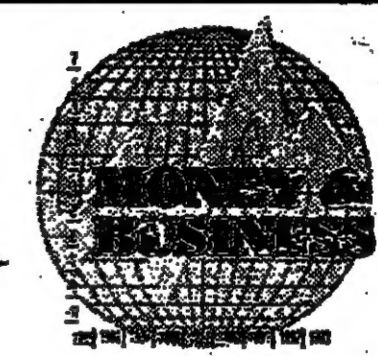
The author is a renowned historian and a professor of modern history at Ain Shams University.

Paying tax bills by phone

UP TO 23 million taxpayers in the United States will be eligible to pay their tax bills by filing their returns by phone. The call will take only 10 minutes.

This system is being used by 3 million out of the total number of taxpayers using filing forms who will gain the advantage of the new paperless system. At the conclusion of the call, the taxpayer has to give the personal ID number standing for the signature. Users of this new system should be without dependants and have taxable income of less than $50,000.





French government stands firm despite strikes

THOUSAND of students, railway workers, teachers and post office employees staged a great demonstration in Paris and in many major cities protesting the reform plan of the new cabinet.

Authorities declared that the people who were not taking part in the protest were showing their support to strikers. Though disturbances escalated, Premier Alain Guppé, said he will not go back on his reform programme.

Streets are paralysed with thousands of cars queuing 30 kilometres. The latest polls of *Le Figaro* indicated that 51 per cent think that the government should persue its reform plans.

Sinai — The Site and the History

MOBIL is proud to present its latest book; *Sinai — The Site and History*, an outstanding scholarly work on the development of civilisation in the peninsula of Sinai from the ancient till the present time.

Sinai — The Site and the History contains chapters written by outstanding Egyptian scholars and authorities each within his field of expertise. Namely, Dr. Gamel Moukhtar "This History of Sinai", Dr. Fouad Iskandar "Triangle of Grandeur", Dr. Gawdat Gabra "The Religious Heritage of Sinai", Mr. Samir Sobhi "The Bedouin of Sinai" and Mr. Ayman Taher "Sinai's Underwater World".

The book was compiled and edited by Dr. Mursi Saad El-Din, who also wrote the introduction "The Splendour of Sinai".

This 142-page book includes essays composed by Egypt's most renowned scholars commissioned by Mobil, who share a love of this unique part of Egypt - Sinai. Each chapter of the book can stand alone as a reflection of how each one of them was inspired and impressed by Sinai. We can feel in each word they wrote that to them, Sinai is their own home.

Dr. Mursi Saad El-Din in his chapter "The Splendor of Sinai", describes his feelings and impressions the first time he set foot on Sinai, how it was a kind of revelation for him. Dr. Saad El-Din elaborates more when he recapitulates while walking parts of the Way of Horus the different events and the men who shaped history via that way.

Dr. Gamal Moukhtar deals with history in his chapter "The History of Sinai", in secular terms; unlike any history book that could focus on the lives of kings and emperors, Dr. Moukhtar deviates and tackles the history of people and their beliefs over the millennia. He begins his chapter with an explanation of the name *Sinai* and its deviation and tells about the different historical eras that involved this peninsula.

Dr. Gawdat Gabra complements with his chapter "The Religious Heritage of Sinai" the historical periods of Sinai; he traces religion as practiced in the peninsula throughout history. He carries on where Dr. Moukhtar ends, and examines Sinai's historic role in the world's three great religions: Judaism, Christianity an Islam describing it as the "three crossroads of the three religions".

Dr. Fouad Iskandar deals in his chapter "Triangle of Grandeur" with geography not only from its physical side, but also as a political and economic factor in shaping people's lives and likewise the future development of the peninsula.

Samir Sobhi walks us in his chapter "The Bedouin of Sinai", through the different Bedouin tribes living in this vast peninsula. He tells us about their origin, *traditions, culture and art*. The Bedouin of Sinai are unique from their fellow Egyptians in many aspects; affected by the harsh terrain of the mountains and valleys which have shaped their way of living and even their traditions. Sobhi also describes *the different activities* the Bedouins are engaged in, which even still affect their present life.

Government shutdown rests within Clinton's decision

CONTROVERSIES still exist about the possibility of a US government shutdown which would lay off government workers. This depends on Clinton's fresh plan to balance the budget.

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole was pressuring President Clinton in a bid to convince him to form a plan to balance the budget. He claimed the responsibility would be that of the president's once another shutdown takes place if the temporary spending measures are cut off by 15 December.

There were several debates between the White House and Congress on this issue, but they all reached a stalemate. The Democrats are accusing the Republicans for the breakup of the talks.

The agreement was that the president is committed to negotiate a timetable for balancing the budget.



United Arab Emirates: From barren sands to modern cities



Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan

The overall development in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is admirable. It managed to revive the recurring dream of unity and make the dream a reality. It was development in all areas encompassing industry, agriculture, education, culture and construction, that thereby turned a Bedouin society into an advanced one of the twentieth century.

The UAE is currently celebrating the 24th anniversary of the formation of a culturally and economically homogenous society. A society that used to depend on the pearl trade, primitive agriculture and a simple pastoral life, before the formation of the federation in 1971.

A man of great distinction was behind this, provided with the sincere assistance of the other emirs whose consultations he found indispensable within the Supreme Council of the UAE. It was Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan who successfully managed to anchor the foundations of this federation.

In spite of the fact that the UAE mainly depends on oil revenues, it has managed, by virtue of ambitious short-term development plans, to pass into a new phase, which relies on many resources such as industry, agriculture and tourism. This leap has brought in revenues of Dh134.8 billion in 1994, in comparison with Dh1.5 billion in 1972.

Backing up investment

It is worth noting that there has been enormous spending on development projects, as the state considers development as its prime responsibility, sparing neither effort nor money to increase investment. In this regard, the government was keen to stir up private sector investments, a policy that bore fruit with the great increase in the gross national income in all sectors other than oil production, recording a 7 per cent increase in 1994 (Dh89.8 billion in 1994 in comparison to Dh83.8 billion in 1993).

Industrial development

The growth is attributed to the development of the industrial base, the increase in local demand, the high exportation rate, investment encouraging policies including easy-term loans and other incentives, as well as immense governmental and semi-governmental projects in petroleum-related industries.

With regard to dependence on revenues other than oil, it is seen that the contribution of oil in the gross national income is decreasing one year after another. It plunged from Dh47.1 billion in 1993 to Dh45 billion in 1994, recording a 4.4 per cent decrease. It might be argued that the decline of oil prices, fluctuations in oil market prices and the UAE's commitment to its quota within OPEC is behind the decrease of oil revenues. However, if a comparison is drawn between the volume of oil revenues in the early period of the federation and recent years, we would be able to see the UAE's creation of other resources make up for the decrease by more than 40 per cent of the total national income until 1992.

Remarkable trade boom

The surge of production revenues in other sectors led to a remarkable trade boom represented in the 11.1 per cent increase in imports due to the growing demand of the local market brought about by the expansion in different economic sectors and in increasing the volume of re-exportation income. Re-exportation trade is considered an important commercial activity.

Free zone ports

The strategic location of the United Arab Emirates between the Indian subcontinent and the Far East and between Asia and Africa has encouraged all UAE's ports provide free zone facilities similar to those of Hong Kong. Jabal Ali free zone is one of the most famous, successfully managing to attract investments from all over the world. The number of companies established in Jabal Ali reached 805 and the volume of investments totalled Dh6 billion. There are expectations that this area will attract many Arab companies, particularly from the Gulf, in addition to international companies that often invest in Europe and Asia. Many countries have benefitted from the Jabal Ali experiment, learning ways of attracting and promoting investment.

Highways have been built to provide a smooth flow of traffic, as well as shipyards with advanced loading and unloading facilities, international communications networks and most important of all, the outstanding utilities which provide numerous incentives for investments.

The clean atmosphere and regular maintenance of the infrastructure is also a key factor in attracting investments.

It is expected that the GATT agreement will benefit the UAE with a larger quota of trade.

Banks' key roles

The financing provided by national banks fully owned by local investors, as well as that provided by joint banks and branches of foreign ones, has given a momentum to investments.

The banks' balance surged to reach Dh171.6 billion at the end of December 1994, recording a Dh10.44 billion increase over the previous year.

The funds available rose to Dh92.1 billion, exceeding the credit provided by those banks by Dh93.7 billion.

Utilities bring the UAE to the future

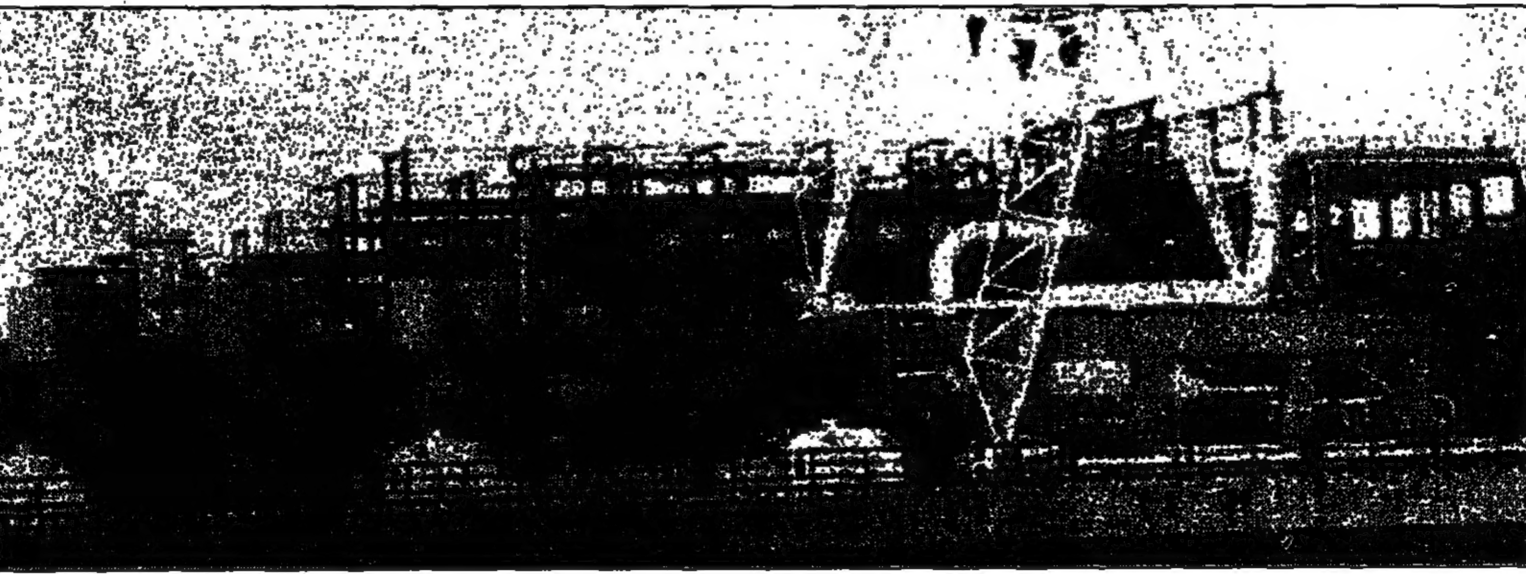
One of the most striking phenomena that the visitor to the UAE notices is the tremendous jump which the UAE has realised in basic utilities which have been given high priority. The country has made great progress in this regard, which provides its citizens a luxurious and a prosperous life.

The seven emirates which make up the UAE were able to achieve this as a result of their federation, which began in 1971 under the leadership of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nihyan, governor of Abu Dhabi and head of the current federation. This federation has permitted a great portion of government financing to be directed towards utility projects and creating an infrastructure literally out of nothing. Since its establishment, the federation has spared no expense in infrastructure expenditures to create large networks of utilities and basic services such as electricity, water, sea ports, airports and the most modern telecommunications with the highest standards of service. These services have been extended to every city in the UAE, transforming barren deserts to cities of the 21st century.

This stage of modernising the UAE was neither a simple or short process. However, the major leap which these projects have brought is due to the unprecedented speed by which they have been implemented.

Equipping the state

This major jump in basic utilities which the UAE has realised is not solely for the purpose of providing a luxurious lifestyle for its citizens, rather it is to give the UAE an economic impetus in development and economic competition which benefits not only the Gulf region, but the entire Middle East.



It is expected that the Middle East in the forthcoming years will witness economic competition to obtain a larger share for investment, labour, and other projects which are expected to be completed in the Middle East.

There is no doubt that the UAE, with its great geographical potential as well as possibilities for basic utilities and high standards of services which these utilities provide, has greater chances for investment, which will permit the UAE to occupy a major place on the international trade map.

The features of this major upswing which the UAE has obtained in the area of basic utilities can be examined in greater detail.

Let us return for a moment, to a time before the creation of the UAE, when such basic services such as roads and telecommunications were not as advanced as they are today; when a journey between one emirate to another would take days, and travel within a single emirate would take more than half a day due to the dense sands and the lack of direct routes.

Today, on the other hand, expressways and telecommunication networks and basic utilities link all areas of the UAE, making communication and transportation within the UAE, as well as to and from all corners of the globe, easier and simpler.

Brightening lives

The UAE has been able to bring light to the lives of its citizens. Before the federation, there were numerous areas in the UAE that were without electricity, water, and disconnected from the rest of the world. As for today, since the establishment of the federation, UAE citizens now enjoy the highest level of electric services. Electric power consumed by it's citizens currently reaches 8000 kilowatt hours, compared to 1972 when it only used 1320 kilowatt hours. Presently, electrical power produced by the Ministry of Electricity and Water has increased by 10.8 per cent over the previous year, reaching 610.8 megawatts over 550.8 megawatts in 1992.

The Ministry of Electricity and Water have exerted great efforts to increase electric power to meet the growing demands of its citizens. The ministry has begun operations to organise projects linking electric networks to the north, which place it on international standards of the highest level.

Water purification

In addition to electricity projects, the UAE is engaged in other projects as well. The UAE is making efforts to establish natural fresh water resources, due to the low level of rainfall which does not exceed 103 millilitres per year, a large percentage of which is lost due to evaporation. To this extent, the UAE is committed to providing fresh water production by purifying sea water.

The UAE has and is still making major investments in purification projects. The UAE currently produces 132,750 billion gallons of purified water, of which 55,500 billion gallons are made up from well water and 77,250 million gallons are made from desalinated water.

The UAE has made great strides in setting up water purification plants spread throughout the country. These plants provide 300 gallons of water per day, an increase of 20 per cent of all water used in the current year, with plans currently underway to increase this figure as well.

The Al-Tawilah organisation in Abu Dhabi is considered one of the largest projects which will provide a great part of the needs of the the entire country.

Ports

As for highways, air and sea ports, the UAE can rightly take pride in the large-scale implementation of these projects. Long, winding expressways link all corners of the UAE while a network of air and sea ports offer their services at the highest level.

The differences between airports in the UAE before and after the federation is clearly illustrated when, at the beginning of the sixties, Abu Dhabi's airport was a small building with one runway that did not meet international specifications and was 5km away from Abu Dhabi itself. Today, that picture is a different story.

International airports

The largest airport in the UAE belongs to Abu Dhabi. Abu Dhabi International Airport, whose area encompasses approximately 100 kilometres, features the most modern technology and equipment. Likewise, another international airport at Al-Ain linked to Abu Dhabi has been opened. The new airport is an architectural masterpiece, a new addition to accommodate the increase in air traffic and travellers coming from and going to Abu Dhabi.

There are many other international airports in the UAE, among them being Dubai International Airport, whose duty-free shop is one of the most famous in the world, offering numerous discounts on a wide variety of merchandise. There are also international airports in Al-Shariqa, Al-Fujayra and Ras Al-Khaymah, all of which link the UAE to all corners of the world, making the UAE a major force within the sphere of air travel and international tourism.

As for sea transport and services, the UAE greatly benefits from the long coastlines which span the waters of the Arab Gulf and the Arab Sea. These coastlines make it possible to establish advanced ports with state-of-the-art equipment. There are 14 ports in the UAE, with 9 major ports and the remainder for sail and fishing boats.

These major ports have increased their activities and services to increase commercial traffic and the number of piers has increased to 200, due to the increase in harbouring activities. Likewise tanker activity has made Dubai a major port city with an advanced marina which places it on a level with other ports world-wide. The volume of tankers entering Dubai has gone beyond a million at the end of 1991 which is indicative of the progressive growth which UAE ports have made with regards to the influx of international trade. It also gauges the extent of the potentiality on which the future of international trade will be carried.

Communicating with the world

In the field of telecommunications, the UAE has made unprecedented progress. The UAE enjoys a telephone service featuring the use of satellite dishes and other forms of technology. The UAE has direct lines to over 173 countries, and is linked to nearly 50 countries by satellite dish. The UAE has succeeded in boosting its long-distance network service within its borders, which is sufficiently maintained and protected.

In light of these current developments, the UAE is now able to be connected to all parts of the world, any time of day or night and by any modern telecommunication device.

There is no doubt that progress made in the field of telecommunications is considered a major revolution in the UAE, which adds to its economic capabilities and strengthens its economic competitiveness within the entire Gulf region and the Middle East.

The generous expenditures which the UAE, since the seven states formed the federation, spends on basic utilities has not only provided modern luxuries for its citizens, but it has also given strong potential for economic growth which has proven the success of Arab potential for the sake of a better future.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Pouting, posturing and peace

For twenty-one days, the three Balkan presidents wheeled and dealed, listened to US negotiator Richard Holbrooke and US Secretary of State Christopher lose their tempers more than once, endured insults and abuse, and were virtually coerced into signing what is at best a tenuous peace agreement. The Muslims and Croats may have secured 51 per cent of the land, the Serbs, 49 per cent but Clinton and Christopher bask in the limelight as the brokers of peace, however unjust. What a sad postscript for an initiative that was born from former President Woodrow Wilson's belief that, "the force of America is the force of moral principle".

In his inaugural address, Clinton stated that the US, unlike other countries, would not take action solely to defend its national interests, but "when the will and conscience of the world is defied." He has now, for the first time, gone so far as to back his rhetoric with action, and will send, pending Congressional approval, 20,000 troops as part of the NATO's 60,000-strong IFOR; but only for one year. Very faux-Wilsonian. In the meantime, while Clinton received pats on the back from Europe's leaders, Bosnia-Herecogovina leader Izetbegovic affirmed that Bosnia is victimised by an agreement that awards half the country to genocidal Serbs — and he vented and lamented. In another room, Serbian boss Milosevic sipped white wine with Christopher who toasted him for being "willing to walk the last mile", and accepting the idea of mediation on Brcko. The UN Security Council also toasted him and suspended the main economic sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro.

But all's well that ends well, and for Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, it has ended very well. The danger of being handed over to the International Criminal Tribunal for his crimes against humanity is marginal. The agreement only pledges cooperation in this regard, not action. In fact, aside from the Nato's force, there is very little that comes out of this agreement which qualifies as decisive action.

In their eagerness to hammer out a peace agreement, Clinton, Holbrooke and Christopher have forgotten that even if the three Balkan leaders are able to set aside their differences, the people they represent may not. History often recalls that which politicians would sooner forget.

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Telex: 20185/93346 Fax: 5786126/5786833

Overseas offices

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New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
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Elections: Egypt and Algeria

What awaits Egypt after its parliamentary elections? **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** ponders the answer

Several records were broken in this week's parliamentary elections, including the largest number of candidates (3980) representing the widest spectrum of political parties (14) and, judging by the first round, the highest election results ever scored by the NDP under Mubarak.

President Mubarak has affirmed Egypt's keenness for pluralism, and this pluralism was clear when it came to the wide variety of people running for parliament, but not when it came to the results, which seemed to contradict the president's declared commitment, on television and in official statements, to a multi-party legislature, which could absorb all tendencies in society within an institutional framework and isolate trends which refuse to act within legitimate channels, and resort instead to violence and terrorism.

Now that the electoral battle is over, the main question has become whether pluralism and democracy can be upheld in the new Assembly, and whether it can stand up effectively to a terrorist threat that was no sooner dealt a decisive blow inside Egypt than it raised its head abroad. In the search for an answer to this question, it might be useful to draw a comparison between the Egyptian elections and the recent Algerian elections. There are obvious differences between the two cases, not least the fact that the former were held to choose members of parliament and the latter a president. Then too, parliamentary elections held on schedule cannot be compared to extraordinary presidential elections held to resolve a constitutional crisis which arose following the suspension of parliamentary elections in 1992 to head off certain victory by the FIS. With its suspension of the elections, the Algerian regime lost much of its credibility, not to say its legitimacy, in the eyes of many Algerians, leading to a bloody civil war which lasted for close on four years and claimed 50,000 victims.

If it is true that the Algerian regime lost its legitimacy in the eyes of many Algerians, the recent presidential elections proved that the regime restored its legitimacy thanks to the Algerian people themselves, not to any other force in the political arena. It was the people, not the opposition parties which boycotted the elections, who flocked to the ballot boxes in massive numbers representing 70 per cent of the electorate. With 61 per cent of the votes cast in his favour, Zeroual was released from any commitment to any specific group and acquired a mandate to take any measures necessary to overcome the crisis.

No one can question the validity of the above figures because the foreign observers invited by the Algerian regime to monitor the elections have certified that they saw no gross violations. Had the Egyptian government invited foreign observers to ensure the integrity of the electoral process, a common practice in recent years, it would have been better placed to rebut accusations of vote-rigging by the opposition.

Despite the many differences between them, the two cases share at least one feature in common. In Algeria, the opposition parties boycotted the elections, while after the first round of Egypt's parliamentary elections, there was talk of some opposition forces boycotting the second round. What is certain is that the electoral process in both cases was percieved in different terms by the regime on one side and by the various opposition forces on the other, threatening to provoke a stalemate in both cases.

But now that the Egyptian elections are over, what steps can the government take to encourage the different political forces to work within the institutional framework and to guarantee that their viewpoints, however different from those of the government, will be taken into account? In fact, there is a problem whose dimensions go beyond the confines of one specific state to touch on all developing countries today, whose peoples are aware that the gulf between developed and underdeveloped societies is widening and not, as the powerful of our world claim, shrinking in the context of a new world order where equal opportunities for development and welfare are assured for all.

The frustrations engendered by this growing gap has spawned powerful rejectionist forces whose neutralisation is a necessary condition for the integrity, stability, indeed, the very existence, of any state. This raises the fundamental question put forward by the Algerian experience, namely, how legitimate is it to waive the rules of democracy when dealing with forces who do not believe in these rules but only invoke them to come to power? Was Algeria's action in suspending the 1992 elections justifiable from a democratic viewpoint, or should the regime have conceded defeat gracefully to the FIS, on the grounds that playing by the rules of the democratic game cannot in the long run favour one specific party only, particularly one that does not believe in democracy?

There is no easy answer to this question, but I believe an open debate might be helpful in this respect. In the meantime, we could look to the experience of President Mubarak himself when he came to power in the aftermath of Sadat's assassination. One of his first acts as president was to release the political detainees representing the whole spectrum of opposition forces arrested by his predecessor one month before his death. This was followed by a lifting of the constraints, amounting to a virtual ban, imposed on the opposition press, which came to enjoy freedoms that impressed observers inside and outside the country. Mubarak thus succeeded in overcoming a crisis that had reached critical proportions before Sadat's assassination by promoting a multiparty mechanism that took the wind out of the sails of the Islamic extremists as the sole representatives of an effective opposition. At the time, the voices of opposition forces operating within the institutional framework of the state, drowned those of the advocates of violence, and opposition became a weapon not only directed against the government but also used by it to withstand external pressures by pointing to internal pressures brought on it by the opposition not to put Egypt through further sacrifices in the name of reform, reconstruction or peace.

In 1995, President Zeroual succeeded, thanks to the support of the Algerian people, in defusing a deep crisis sparked off by the ill-advised suspension of the 1992 legislative elections. In 1982, President Mubarak succeeded in defusing a volatile situation bequeathed to him by his predecessor. The Egyptian president's current term will extend into the next century, spanning a period that will be decisive in determining the issue of peace and stability in the region. He faces a difficult mission whose successful completion will depend in large measure on how closely the Mubarak of 1995 is committed to the options chosen by the Mubarak of 1982.

In the interests of all

By Naguib Mahfouz



The tasks facing the new People's Assembly are enormous. It is an enormity exacerbated by the huge majority enjoyed by the NDP, which means that the burden of responsibility will not be shared with the opposition.

I do not quibble about the size of the NDP's majority though I would have preferred that the party be supported in its tasks by a strong opposition. No political party that believes in democracy and a correct parliamentary process should be absent from the Assembly. Such absence only means the pursuit of aims outside the parliament's walls, and outside a parliamentary system.

Allowing a plurality of points of view in parliament helps to lessen political and social tensions in the country and diminishes those strains so harmful to political life.

Our democratic experience has finally reached the stage where it is becoming entrenched in our political consciousness. Nobody can openly state that they are against democracy. And since all declare their acceptance of democratic principles, why not allow them to behave democratically and stop them from using extra-parliamentary methods. We are at the stage where our first concern must be to inculcate a respect for legitimacy.

I hope that independent candidates do not end up joining the NDP. A strong opposition, representing all strands of opinion, is in the interests of the nation, in the interests of stability and in the interests of the NDP.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

A fundamental difference

Gamil Matar takes issue with the notion that international crime, fundamentalism, the trade in drugs and weapons, constitute a second pole in the international system

In an article published in *Al-Ahram Weekly* on 23 November, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, as usual, expounded a thesis worthy of debate. He presented it in the form of a rhetorical question: Are we entering a "bi-polar" system of a new, totally unfamiliar nature?

According to Sid-Ahmed, one "pole" at least is known and can be identified. We call it "the new world order", a term that comprises all the nations of the world, regardless of the disparity or conflict between them. It also includes various international organisations, such as the UN, as well as multinational corporations.

As for the other "pole", it is a nebulous entity. It is the antipode of the "new world order" and signifies chaos and anarchy. It is difficult to pin down in terms of geographical location, its boundaries difficult to describe. Yet, it comprises what we term terrorist activities, fundamentalist extremism and various areas of prohibited commerce, such as trade in illegal drugs, radioactive materials and advanced weaponry.

In short, Sid-Ahmed posited an international system comprised of two international orders — the first the commonly accepted "new world order", which he neither describes as multipolar or uni-polar, and the second chaos or anarchy, lorded over by terrorist kings, mafia overlords and various merchants of death. It is an original conception, in that it posits that the network of inter-relations that currently cover our planet within the context of the prevailing world order are in fact part of a larger, "infinite" system.

The existence of rebellious or illegal elements, or factions advocating change, does not necessarily diminish the quality or value of an international order, new or old. In the world order that prevailed between the first and second world wars, communism and Nazism were able to take root in the very heart of Western capitalism. All three existed within a single multi-polar international order and all aimed to destroy that order and create a unilateral order whereby one ideology would dominate. In other words, a single order contained contradictory trajectories.

In the aftermath of the second world war, a new international system emerged, the two major poles of which were radically antithetical. It was against this backdrop that wars of national liberation were fought, and the non-aligned movement was formed. The objectives of such multi-national and trans-national movements conflicted with, and sometimes contradicted, the existing hegemony. In western capitals such movements were perceived as elements of chaos and disorder, operating outside the accepted norms of international behaviour. In fact, western powers actively attempted to quash such movements, provoking internecine conflict within their colonies, inciting wars between various countries and assassinating the leaders of liberation movements.

It is risky, in both theoretical and practical terms, to categorise religious revivalism — or fundamentalism as some prefer to call it — nationalist revival, sectarian and ethnic revivals as components of disorder. Such compartmentalisation creates conflicts that are far from inevitable. Certainly such elements existed in the bi-polar order, though their amplification in the aftermath of the collapse of that system has tended to blind us to this fact. The arms trade, for example, is fuelled by nations fully integrated in the existing world order.

Nor can I understand those who perceive fundamentalism as an extraordinary anarchical phenomenon. Fundamentalists are not, after all, extra terrestrial life forms invading our planet. Fundamentalism(s) have always been around, indeed, have lent impetus to major historical events, including the Puritan colonisation of North America, the Jewish colonisation of Palestine and the establishment of Pakistan. Fundamentalism in Eastern Europe contributed to the collapse of communism. It has been and remains an integral part of the capitalist West. Christian fundamentalists are one of the mainstays of the Republican Party in the US. And such facts, supplemented by a great many others, make it impossible to isolate religious fundamentalism from the existing world order and establish it as a second pole in a bi-polar international system.

I would like to ask Sid-Ahmed to contemplate again recent events in Israel and Saudi Arabia. In both these countries the legitimacy of the regime rests on religious fundamentalism, in spite of a strong secular trend in Israel and a nascent secular trend in Saudi Arabia. It is impossible to maintain that fundamentalism is antithetical to these regimes. Fundamentalists may differ with the state in regard to objectives and strategies, but they are part and parcel of the entire system. What is new, in both instances, is that fundamentalists have begun to resort to violence in the exercise of their right to differ with the ruling regime. The practice of violence does not necessarily imply that fundamentalists — or terrorists — are the alternative or even possess an alternative. Nor do they constitute a separate nation within the nation or a national enterprise intended to supplant Israel or Saudi Arabia. They have grown up and developed within those countries.

Even in more secular nations fundamentalism feeds on domestic factors. Fundamentalists in India, the US and in the Arab World have needed little external encouragement. One cannot detach fundamentalism from the environment in which it is rooted, the ground out of which it grows. It is part and parcel of the conditions and circumstances of particular nations. Similarly, international fundamentalist, nationalist and ethnic revivals cannot be isolated from the international order in which they develop. Nor can one detach the international trade in illicit drugs and weaponry and organised crime around the world from the spread of corruption among politicians and the moral degeneration of elites, particularly those who have recently assumed power.

None of the phenomena above, taken individually or collectively — regardless of how extensive or aggravated they become — can be considered as constituting a pole within the international order. They are the result of the collapse of the bi-polar world order. They did not create international chaos but are, rather, a product of that chaos, of the rapid pace of change and the inability of statesmen in the majority of nations to formulate policies that can keep pace with change, of a lack of resolve in combating corruption and in addressing astounding disparities in income. They are the result of a failure to present alternatives to the ruthless despotism of the new individualism that is distorting the image of liberal democracy.

I believe that international organised crime, the illicit trade in arms, drugs and weapons, together with terrorism (whether organised or not) should be classified as subordinate systems, just like OPEC, the European Union and NAFTA. The only difference is that the former are generically specific whereas the latter have a regional, political nature.

The writer is director of the Arab Centre for Development and Futuristic Research.

The Press This Week

By Hassan Fouad

Of might and right

THE RESULTS of the first round of the general elections triggered conflicting reactions from different sections of the press. The opposition papers criticised the elections, fiercely attacking National Democratic Party (NDP) candidates and accusing the government machinery of being biased in favour of that party. As for the national papers, they welcomed the results and dismissed opposition accusations. However, three of the national papers' columnists expressed their reservations over the electoral process.

In **Akhbar El-Yom**, **Mustafa Amin** wrote sarcastically in his back-page column: "Had the 13 opposition parties boycotted the elections the NDP would not have gotten more votes. If Saad Zaghloul had emerged from his grave to run the elections he would not have defeated the opposition to the extent Premier Atef Sidqi has. And if Gamal Abdel-Nasser had personally supervised the elections his popular charisma would not have succeeded in accomplishing half of what the NDP has done.

"It is strange that the NDP should defeat all the opposition parties and the independents as well as all the sceptics who wished to see new faces replace the old."

On the same day, **Kamel Zuheiri** wrote in his back-page column in **Al-Gomhuria**: "The strongest party in Egypt is the spectators' party. The number of votes obtained by the Cairo candidates is worrying. In the Sayeda Zeinab constituency the winning candidate obtained only 9,237 votes although one or two streets hold more than that number. In Old Cairo the winning candidate obtained 5,886 votes. The case is the same with other constituencies: in Al-Darb Al-Ahmar the winning candidate obtained slightly more than 1,000 votes and it was the same in Al-Gamaliya.

"These numbers point to a dangerous political phenomenom which we complained about in the last parliamentary elections and have cause to complain of in the current elections."

'If the elections were rigged would there have been such a great number of re-election contests? Had the government intervened in the elections would the brother of the premier have failed to get a seat?'

Samir Ragab

On Sunday **Salama Ahmed Salama** wrote in his **Al-Ahram** daily column: "It is evident in the statements made by Adel Sidqi, brother of the premier and head of the legislative committee in the last Assembly, and Supply Minister Ahmed El-Guweili that many NDP scapegoats have been sacrificed, in violation of President Mubarak's entreaties that absolute neutrality should be observed. The inherent danger of what has happened lies in its effect on the enthusiasm and high hopes generated initially by the election battle. Many were encouraged to participate and a large percentage of voters went to the polling booths.

"The shock will be felt by the rising generation who have been disheartened by the experience. This is the generation we fear for; the practices of their fathers can only lead the Egyptian citizen to take a more negative approach towards political life — and this is the real danger."

Ibrahim Se'eda, editor-in-chief of **Akhbar El-Yom**, says the opposite in his weekly page-one comment over three columns entitled "Observations on the elections": "The latest election battle was new in its implementation and in its results. This is the first time we have seen citizens prepared to do their national duty in choosing parliamentary candidates. In previous People's Assembly elections the voters boycotted the voting booths despite official figures which claimed that attendance was between 80-90 per cent."

The national papers said that attendance was unprecedented and published the minister of the interior's comment at his press conference that the voter turnout was 50 per cent.

On the same page one of **Akhbar El-Yom**, **Ahmed Ragab** wrote a piece entitled "The respectable deputy" in which he said: "The respectable deputy is one who does not trade in drugs, pilgrimage visas or ministers' signatures. He does not consider his immunity a gift from heaven nor set himself up as a demi-god over government institutions. He does not wreak havoc in arranging transactions and bidding for tenders. He does not set himself up above all other Egyptians and fly first class at taxpayers' expense. He does not accept payment for a People's Assembly session he has not attended and is not committed to applaud and pass half-baked laws."

On Thursday **Al-Akhbar** said editorially: "All that can be said before the final results appear is that these have been the biggest and cleanest elections Egypt has witnessed since the inception of parliamentary life. There is a feeling that this time we will obtain a parliament that is truly representative of the enlightened voter and that we will at last have a parliament which will be able to serve all citizens, those who chose it and those who did not".

On the same day **Al-Gomhuria** said editorially: "The new parliament will hold its first session on 13 December and it is thought that the deputies, regardless of political orientation, will select Dr Fathi Sorour as speaker.

"It is also thought that Dr Atef Sidqi will head the new government. It is hoped that the government will carefully study all draft laws and to remove all possible loopholes. It is also hoped that the government — premier and ministers — will listen to deputies' opinions and discuss matters with them. Frankly, we refuse to see laws rushed through parliament without prior study."

On Saturday **Samir Ragab**, board chairman of Dar Al-Tahrir, replied in his back-page column in **Al-Gomhuria** to accusations that the NDP had rigged the elections: "If the elections were rigged would there have been such a great number of re-election contests? Had the government intervened in the elections would the brother of the premier have failed to get a seat? And had the NDP employed thugs, as the opposition claims, would a good number of its candidates have been killed or wounded due to attacks by others?"

In **October** magazine **Ragab El-Banna** wrote a four-page article entitled "What after the elections?" in which he said: "We have been preoccupied with the elections. They have become a fierce battle — political, inter-party and personal. They have taken a long time during a period when we need time to work, face dangers and complete the reconstruction of the country. The atmosphere around us has been inundated with promises, persuasive emotional words, realistic and imaginary programmes as well as dreams and aspirations."

'Yesterday's elections have shown that might is above right and thuggery above law, pushing democratically-oriented parties to find non-democratic means and to confront the NDP with its own weapons'

Gamal Badawi

On Sunday, **Mahfouz El-Ansari**, editor-in-chief of **Al-Gomhuria** wrote a two-column article on page one entitled "Results still in voters' hands" in which he said: "I fear that some people imagine that the elections have ended in favour of NDP candidates with the defeat of independents and opposition candidates. They are mistaken, for the results are far from being final."

As for the opposition press, **Al-Wafd** described the elections as "thuggery" and "the worst elections in Egypt's history". The Islamist-orientated **Al-Shaab** described the elections as a "massacre" and **Al-Ahrar** described election day as "black Wednesday".

On Thursday **Gamal Badawi**, editor-in-chief of **Al-Wafd**, wrote a three-column article on page one entitled: "Might above right" (which is the reverse of the Wafd's slogan "Right above might") in which he criticised the NDP victory. He said: "Yesterday's elections have shown that might is above right and thuggery above law, pushing democratically-oriented parties to find non-democratic means to prove their presence in the Egyptian street and to confront the NDP with its own weapons."

In the special issue of **Al-Ahali** on Sunday, editor-in-chief **Abdel-Aal El-Bakouri** wrote a two-column front page commentary entitled "No to thuggery, no to rigging" in which he said: "Maj. Gen. Hassan El-Alfi has admitted that there were excesses by the police, that there was rigging and unimaginable expenditure. The man responsible for internal security in Egypt tried to put the blame on others, forgetting that the government — of which he is a member — is responsible for any excesses or rigging."

Close up

Salama A. Salama

A necessary corrective

The announcement, at the beginning of the election campaign, that an independent commission was to be formed to review and monitor the electoral process, caused many eyebrows to be raised. Writers and commentators were joined by officials within the Ministry of Interior in stating that the guarantees *built into the* electoral system were such as to make the commission redundant. There was, they argued, no need of foreign or any other supervision. Elections were a purely domestic matter, falling under the jurisdiction of the legal system.

The formation of the commission, though, went ahead. It was composed entirely of Egyptians, a group of prominent public figures without party political affiliations and unattached to any government body. They were charged with observing, with impartiality, the supervision of the electoral process with the aim of recording both its positive and negative aspects. The intention was to court the confidence of the silent majority, for too long excluded from political life. The commission's task was to combat the pessimism that has shrouded elections, and to act as a corrective to those administrative errors — both executive and party political — that undermine the electorate's confidence. The commission was also charged with reviewing the comportment of candidates and voters, in the hope that they would produce recommendations that might profit future elections. In short, the commission was intended to bolster democracy, and the democratic process, at all levels.

The commission was subjected to many attacks, some of which were based on a deliberate misreading of its allotted tasks. Yet it has completed its tasks, and has already issued a detailed report incorporating its observations on the first round of the campaign. Nearly one-third of the total constituencies — 88 in number — were included in the report's observations. The report records positive and negative aspects of the campaign and the procedures and patterns of behaviour, correct and incorrect, of all participants in the process — *candidates and voters, party* members and independents, officials and the public.

Here is not the place to précis the contents of the report, which is now lodged with those responsible for Egyptian political life. Publication of the report, however, may well help some people to understand the differences between what is released in official statements and what is published in the opposition press.

We must admit that we lack the necessary maturity to correctly follow the electoral process. Deficiencies run across the board — political parties, candidates, official bodies and the electorate are all implicated. And to correct these deficiencies it is necessary that we first admit their existence. It is only by facing up to such inadequacies that we can possibly hope to overcome them. Without the admission of error we shall never be able to advance forward. Instead, we shall continue to go round in circles, deluding ourselves that we are following the democratic track.

It is not asking much to request that the official apparatus, including parties and politicians, bear in mind the recommendations of the commission. These recommendations should be made public so that the electorate can familiarise themselves with mistakes that were made. Such *familiarity* is a necessary prelude to the correction of similar mistakes in the future.



Soapbox

The buck stops...where?

Though at the time of writing the final results of the second round of the elections have yet to be announced, we already know, given the results of the first round, that the emerging parliament will contain a vast NDP majority. Its composition is testimony to the limited success of the opposition, and to the relative success of independent candidates. The Islamist trend has ceased to exist on a parliamentary level.

As always happens, those who failed in the elections will seek to place the blame on irregularities in the electoral process. Objectively, it would be difficult to point to such irregularities in the majority of constituencies. It is, however, noteworthy that whatever irregularities *did* occur were the responsibility not of the supervisory apparatus, but were a result of candidates' own actions, be they representatives of the NDP, the opposition parties or independents.

The election campaign coincided with the terrorist attack on the Egyptian Embassy in *Islamabad*. News of the attack was greeted with outrage on the part of the general public. The electorate went to the polls with every intention of registering their disgust with representatives of the Islamist trend. Just as happened in the Algerian presidential elections, the electorate overwhelmingly condemned the Islamist trend It is now clearly associated, in the minds of the ordinary citizen, not only with attempts to undermine the Egyptian economy, but with outrageous acts of terror.

The failure of representatives from the opposition parties at the *polls is a result not of electoral malpractice but of* the failure of the parties themselves. The dictatorial approaches of party leaders, men who have turned their parties into personal fiefdoms, have resulted in the political stagnation of the opposition. Their inability to present new solutions and new faces has alienated the public. Such criticisms as are levelled at the opposition parties can be applied to the NDP, but to a lesser degree. And in the eyes of most voters the NDP at least has the apparatus to secure their interests, which is why the NDP secured their votes.



This week's Soapbox speaker is a senior columnist with Al-Ahram.

Salah Montasser

Patriotism and the private sector

Edward Said questions the ability of Palestinian businessmen to counteract the inequities of the Oslo agreements, and the likelihood of their acting in 'the national interest'

As I understand it, the Amman economic "summit" was convened at the end of last month in order to bring economic development into the peace process, thereby guaranteeing a change for the better in the lives of people (principally the Palestinians) whose deprivations and generally low quality of life have to be addressed. Thus political arrangements alone are regarded as insufficient, whether because they have to do only with changes in administration and jurisdiction, or because, as I believe, they do not really improve the lives of most Palestinians except superficially. Thus if people could experience actual economic prosperity then perhaps the current peace process might stand a better chance of long-range acceptance.

No less important an issue in Amman was Israel's role as a newly powerful entrepreneurial force in the Arab world. To this end, a large number of Israeli businessmen appeared as part of the Israeli delegation, in effect looking for Arab business part*ners in enterprises that ran the full gamut* from big industrial ventures to the manufacture of consumer products and the marketing of services.

The word "private" in such a context is somewhat misleading, since every independent businessman, Arab or Israeli, was there by virtue of a massive change in governmental policy. This change made it possible for the first time since 1948 for individual Palestinians and Israelis to cooperate in joint business ventures. So in effect the private sector followed the government's lead, acting within an area of economic activity for which prior protection and approval had been granted by politicians, not by businessmen acting on their own.

But whether it admitted it or not, the delegation of Palestinian businessmen was acting to consolidate the asymmetries and discrepancies in power and advantage that now exist between Palestinians and Israelis as a result of Oslo I, Cairo, Taba, plus of course of a whole series of economic agreements that disadvantage Palestinians vis-à-vis Israelis.

There are two arguments that have been put forward by the business community to justify its sudden rush to investment and development — either alone or with Israeli business partners — in the autonomous zones. Both arguments depend on appeals to progress and development.

The first argument takes as its point of departure the undoubted fact that the peace process has become a reality within which Palestinians now *live* on less than a quarter of the Occupied Territories, if not in an improved, then certainly in a different status; there they have some control over civil affairs, municipal functions, and internal security. Why not then use this different status to begin to establish businesses that would employ Palestinians, build a few institutions, and give them a chance at "trickle-down" prosperity?

The second argument is more sophisticated, and even a little cynical. Since the Palestine Authority can never be capable of controlling the economy, given that all it seems to be interested in is control and security, why not let it concentrate on those matters, and leave everything else to the private sector, which is supposedly made up of loyal, nationalistic Palestinians who want to help their people develop and have proved their ability in the Gulf, Europe and elsewhere to do so efficiently and effectively? I have even heard a few Palestinian businessmen suggesting that since Israelis want to come in on some of this activity, why not use their money and expertise in our favour?

Just before the big Amman meeting last May between Palestinian businessmen, Yasser Arafat, and King Hussein, I spoke to one of the prime movers, an extremely prosperous and influential Palestinian businessman behind all of this. I expressed my discomfort with various aspects of what the private sector was proposing, and I said that I found it difficult to accept the notion that what moved businessmen to invest in Gaza or the West Bank was altruistic nationalism. I pointed out that a real estate and building boom had already begun, and that on its own it scarcely suggested a general improvement in the lives of all Palestinians. And when it came to large projects of national scope — electricity, telephones, roads, water — those had to be administered not by the private but by the public sector. I was told in response that this kind of thinking is now outdated, since with the demise of the Soviet Union, "socialist ideas were dead" and the economy was to be delivered back to private investors and private organisations. Gone are the days when a national authority was responsible for the infrastructure: even in the United States, I was reminded, electric companies and prisons in some states have been privatised.

I responded with two arguments. No one has proved that privatisation and "free" enterprise have actually improved services like electricity, transportation, and the penal system. The indications are in fact that rates have gone up, service has become poorer, and in many instances the less advantaged citizen is not treated as well as a wealthy one. Second, and more important, deregulation in the United States exists in an environment and society of laws; there are federal commissions that oversee the stock market, the airline industry, power, transportation, and the media.

There are not such provisions made for private sector investments in Gaza and the West Bank. If a "public" electricity company is about to be established, the stockholders are going to be wealthy businessmen who can buy up and control all the shares, and can thereafter operate without regulatory or oversight committees who represent the interests of the consumer and indeed of the population at large.

Besides, in an autocracy of the sort that now obtains in the Palestinian autonomy zones, the main requirement is that Mr Arafat gives his approval (as he has to so many deal-makers); there are no provisions for anything like public sector supervision since the Chairman rules by personal fiat, not by constitution or by law.

Israel has a highly developed, aggressive economy; it has a relatively efficient public sector and, so far as its governmental strategy for the surrounding region is concerned, it has a definite plan to penetrate and enter markets, using its competitive edge plus its superior organisation and economic skills.

The crucial thing is not just Israel's power, but its system of accountability, for which no equivalent at all exists in the Arab world, and certainly not in Palestine. Contracts in Palestine are awarded by the ruler — as Mr. Arafat has done — and a compact is set and maintained between the individual entrepreneur and the ruler. There is very little to inhibit, or to call to account the investor, except for the ruler's good will and short-term interests.

In the Palestinian context this vacuum is particularly debilitating since, in the absence of independent institutions (courts, citizens' groups, a relatively free media, etc.) it is the private sector made up of individual, or groups of, businessmen which has the power to control economic and commercial activity. And this sector, no matter how much its members say otherwise, are guided not by altruism or nationalism, but by interests, profits, and the vagaries of the globalised economy. Very few of them have ever lived under a rigorously administered tax code — indeed, one of the anomalous things about the Arab world is that, to all intents and purposes, its business community is largely free of the burden of taxes of the kind paid by its Japanese, European, and North American counterparts — and very few of them are likely to do so in the new Palestine.

Finally there are two very serious misapprehensions on the part of Arab businessmen who extol the virtues of the free market and an unregulated private sector. One is that they wrongly compare themselves with Western businessmen who live and work in countries that have a very vigorous civil society, with institutions like universities, the media, an independent judiciary, a functioning parliament, and a whole host of private citizen's groups (unions, associations, clubs, etc.); there is no equivalent of this in the Arab world, and certainly not in Palestine.

Second, the middle class from which European and American businessmen emerged grew out of a long battle with the feudal aristocracy; one of the results of this struggle was the French Revolution, the bourgeois revolution as it has been called, that was later to produce an internal social dynamic involving the new class and remnants of the old. The new class was not only a producer of wealth and industrialisation, it also produced culture, including the great realistic novel, scientific and philosophic societies, operas and concert halls, philanthropies: all this constantly challenged or restricted the power of the monarch or the executive.

Such a development has not occurred in the Arab world. Thus the Palestinian business community, for example, has very little social advantage to its side, except for its alliance with the ruler and its money. Bound *to and restrained by neither an active civil so*ciety nor a flourishing culture, the private sector cannot, and indeed should not be expected, to provide the kind of moral, and truly nationalistic leadership which it claims it has the right to exercise. It is no wonder then that the Palestine Authority — like other such bodies in the Third World — has decided that its allies are businessmen and its enemies are non-governmental institutions, ie the institutions that make possible a genuine civil society.

It is in opposing this situation that efforts should be placed, and not in unrestrained private investment. In other words, the real requirement for development is not simply capital but an awakened social consciousness and a serious interest in national civil institutions.

Priorities for the parliament

Fathi Abdel-Fattah leaves the election campaign behind and examines the future

The electoral campaign that has absorbed public attention for months now is at last over, and as usual, in the aftermath of the campaign and its results, *it is all too easy to* get lost in a useless post mortem of events. Unfortunately, in dissecting the campaign commentators have a tendency to lose sight of the important issues. And what could be more important than the tasks which the new People's Assembly will face?

The results of the election will dictate the composition of Egypt's last parliament of this century. And certainly the questions that have arisen and cast their shadow over the recent campaign, concerning both procedural matters and issues of party organisation, will have to be addressed by the new parliament.

First among these issues must be a consideration of the most appropriate ways of facilitating the further evolution of social democracy. For democracy to thrive it is essential to create an atmosphere in which every citizen, through participation, feels that they have a vested interest in consolidating the security necessary for social and economic development.

Consolidating the principles of democracy through participation — what more effective weapon could we conceive in the battle to overcome terrorism and violence? Nor is the efficacy of such a policy altered one jot by the fact that terrorism may be shrouded in a religious ideology.

It seems to me self-evident that the defeat of terrorism can only be effected through democratic means. It is not, after all, enough simply to eliminate those elements intent on destroying the security of the nation. Far more important is to elevate the value of freedom, freedom to think, to innovate, to develop. Such freedoms will be essential if we are to successfully negotiate the obstacles which we will undoubtedly face as we move into the 21st century. The scientific and technological revolution that will shape the coming century — that is, indeed, already delineating its contours — cannot be allowed to pass us by.

In this age of technological advance, when we are all bystanders on the edge of the information highway, it is neither logical nor acceptable to legally restrict access to information or freedom of expression. As long as any individual is willing to abide by the principles of democratic debate, he or she should be allowed to debate anything and everything.

In a world where the operation of market forces is increasingly dictating future possibilities, development in Third World societies will be dependent on attention being paid to two dimensions.

First is the social dimension. We must work towards widening the social guarantees available to productive individuals in such vital fields as education, health and housing. We must work towards the provision of job opportunities since, in the final analysis, people are the most important capital with which we have to work. Development is dependent upon an infrastructure capable of utilising the potential of the individual.

Second is the national dimension. Egypt is located at the intersection of several circles — with a foot in the Arab, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean worlds.

Egypt's development potential cannot be restricted exclusively to any one of these circles. Policies must be managed in such a way as to ensure the harmonious interplay of all three. Naturally, this involves the drawing up of a list of priorities. A first priority, however, must be to avoid isolationism.

The battle to achieve greater Arab political and economic cooperation could constitute objective and safe ground from which to explore the expanding horizons offered by enhanced cooperation in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern spheres. And, of course, all of this is dependent on the success of the project to establish true peace in the region.

The new parliament, Egypt's last of this century, has rather a lot on its plate.

The writer is a social scientist and a senior journalist with Al-Gomhouria.

To The Editor

Religious interest

Sir- I am writing in response to Ahmed Sidki Al-Dajani's article, "Religion and Civilisation" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 23-29 November), in which he discussed the European Union's recent interest in religion and the Arab World. Al-Dajani's assertion that "this interest emerged after the US raised the question of a new Middle Eastern order" is hardly substantiated. I believe that this interest has been going on for quite a long time now.

Although "the EU's current position on religion is closely related to the Arab World" as the writer said, this position has essentially come into existence as a direct result of the rise of fundamentalist and extremist movements in several Arab countries. Therefore, the EU's interest in religion springs mainly from its fear of the serious implications that may ensue if fundamentalists and extremists seize power.

The secularist ideologies that govern Western societies clearly prove the fact that their "interest in religion" is only temporary and it has never been for religion's sake. I dare say that once the tide of fundamentalism and extremism has ebbed in the Arab World, the EU's alleged interest in religion will also come to a halt.

Essam Hanna Wahba
Salam Language School
Assiut

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah — Private politics

Brother strove against brother, families and clans were split asunder, the NDP ran fiercely against the NDP, and, in one of the most heated and *violent* electoral battles in contemporary history, a score and more fell dead and dozens were injured. It is interesting therefore that only in a few urban centres, particularly where strong Islamist candidates were running, was the polarisation along ideological and political lines. For the most part, ferocious electoral battles were engaged not over politics, but business opportunities.

Three main features of the election may illustrate this point:

— The ten-to-one scramble over Assembly seats (4,000 candidates competing for 444 seats) seemed to signal a revival of the parliamentary spirit in the country. But the great bulk of these spirited candidates ran as independents, and most of them were renegade members of the ruling NDP, running against their party's official candidates. As for the country's 14 legal political parties, as well as the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, the total number of candidates they were able to field fell short of covering the 444 seats available. Alternative political and ideological platforms (assuming that all opposition party candidates not only had them, but campaigned around them) accounted therefore for a mere fraction — some 10 per cent — of the campaigning.

— The great paradox in the '95 elections lies in the fact that the competition between politically disinterested candidates was no less heated, or violent, than that between political opponents, including the election's arch-foes, the NDP and the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, one of the fiercest competitions in the whole election — boasting its first incident of violence, back at the start of the campaign — was between two leading members of the ruling party: Adel Sidki, brother of the prime minister and official candidate of the NDP, running against local party boss and multi-millionaire, Atia El-Fayoumi. El-Fayoumi won in the first round.

— The third pronounced feature of the election, and the subject of extensive commentary by analysts and columnists, is the enormous amounts of money spent on the campaign. While commentators have differed on the extent of violence, levels of participation, degree of fairness, *etc.* compared to *previous* elections, few would dispute the fact that these have been by far the most expensive elections ever held in Egypt. And by far the largest part of the millions spent on the campaigning came not from the political parties — including the NDP — nor even from large business conglomerates backing certain candidates who will defend their interests once they win a seat. For the most part, they seemed to come from the businessmen/candidates' own pockets. Why, one may well ask, should a shrewd businessman, who has little interest in politics or legislation, squander some five million pounds to win a seat in parliament? This while keeping in mind that Egypt's entrepreneur class has, in the past couple of decades — recession notwithstanding — come to expect extremely lucrative returns on investment.

General election '95 may go down in Egypt's history as the true herald of the nation's entry into the age of liberalisation. But just as liberalisation of the economy is synonymous with privatisation, so it seems is liberalisation in the realm of politics.

Last Wednesday was above all the day of the rising class of Egyptian entrepreneurs — the favoured winning horse on which USAID, scores of international agencies and the lonely, and largely newly-converted ideologues of liberalism in Egypt, have long banked. It is this class, we have been told repeatedly, which will instill vigour into the economy and genuine pluralism into politics. But as it turns out, the one 'liberal' idea which the many money-squandering, *head-bashing, ballot-box-snatching, heavy* campaigning entrepreneur/candidates seem to have had in common last Wednesday, was that it was parliament itself that was due for privatisation. Liberalisation with a twist.

Whatever the results of yesterday's second and final round of the election, we are now certain that the coming parliament will be characterised by a very weak opposition presence. No more than 13 per cent in the rather unlikely event that all opposition candidates taking part — including those of the Muslim Brotherhood — will win their contested seats.

Our hopes then must be pinned on those who, irrespective of their politics, have made it to parliament to do politics — MPs who view the house as a public domain, a state body, not a private club where members can doze off between deals.

Exclusion and nostalgia

Hani Mustafa reviews Arab entries in this year's festival



Palestinian film *Hikayat Al-Gawaher Al-Thalatha* (Tale of the Three Jewels), directed by Michel Khalifa

Five Arab countries are participating in the Cairo International Film Festival (CIFF) this year — Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Algeria and Tunisia.

The Syrian film *Su'oud Al-Mattar* (Ascending Rain), in the second week of the festival programme, is not the first film by director Abdel-Latif Abdel-Hamid to be screened at the CIFF. An earlier film by the director, *Layali Ibn Aawa* (Nights of the Jackal), which won a handful of awards on the international festival circuit, was also screened in Cairo.

Such multi-festival screenings, however, have recently begun to be viewed less magnanimously by festival organisers all over the world. The Algerian entry in the international competition, *Kan Yama Kan* (Once Upon a Time), directed by Belkacem Hadjadj, seems likely to fall foul of festival organisers' desires to premiere films in their competitions. Should the rumour that Hadjadj's film was screened in Shanghai be confirmed, the film will be excluded from the official competition.

The Palestinian entry, Michel Khalifa's *Hikayat Al-Gawaher Al-Thalatha* (Tale of the Three Jewels), has already met a similar fate. It was excluded from competition when it was revealed that 50 minutes of the film had already been shown on satellite television. It was subsequently relegated to the tail end of the festi11ÇÜ though times for screenings have not yet — at the time of writing — been published.

One Arab film already screened to mostly appreciative audiences is the Tunisian-Algerian-French co-production *Habiba M'sike Aw Raqssat Al-Narr* (Habiba M'sike or the Fire Dance), directed by Selma Baccar. The filmography of the 1920s Jewish Tunisian actress, dancer and singer Habiba M'sike, explores both the art of the performer and her relationship with her almost exclusively male audience. As *Habiba M'sike* contrasts two seeming stereotypes, the issue of women's freedom is foregrounded. M'sike, who hosts a literary salon, mixes on an equal footing with artists, while her aunt, impresario of a theatre troupe, attempts to stage a play calling for Tunisian independence. The lives of these two women are, throughout the film, contrasted with the confined existence of the secluded, bourgeois women in the household of Al-Shazli, a poet who is one of M'sike admirers.

M'sike refuses to confine herself to the Jewish community — a decision exemplified when she breaks off her relationship with the wealthy Maimouni. When Maimouni asks her to abandon her career in favour of a comfortable existence within the Jewish community, she abandons him. But other dilemmas are not so easy to solve: M'sike is torn between her relationship with Al-Shazli and Pierre, a French intellectual whom she met in Paris. The struggle crystallises the dilemma between the self-dividing fascination with European culture and devotion to Arab art.

Undoubtedly the film incorporates a deal of painstaking historical research, in which the director must have been aided by her earlier, documentary work on M'sike. Yet there are moments when the film veers off into a melodramatic overload which serves to obscure the very real issues dealt with, more often than not, in an intelligent manner.

Jocelyne Saab's *Kan Ya Ma Kan Fi Beirut* (Once Upon a Time in Beirut) was also screened in the first week of the festival, under the umbrella of the women's film section. The film is a reconstruction of Beirut before civil war changed the city forever. This she does through collating sequences from Lebanese and international feature films set in Beirut. Within the framework of the depiction of the lives of two women, Yasmine and Leila, born towards the beginning of the civil war, Saab gathers together sequences from feature films, Lebanese and foreign, shot in Beirut before the war began.

The image of pre-war Beirut emerges through these clips which begin to serve a documentary role, recording the gradual sectioning of the city. Most of the time Saab's very developed technique in montage lends coherence to the film: crime and espionage is juxtaposed with rosier romantic comedies as Farid Al-Atrash, Rushdi Abaza, Faten Hamama and the Lebanese comedian Shushu overlap with Yasmine and Laila, girls who dream of becoming stars. Such assembly, while thoroughly exploring a palpable nostalgia for the glory days of Beirut, was at times a little distracting as the film threatened to become no more than a piecing together of fragments, a pasting together of disjointed images on both 35 mm and 70 mm stock.

Music

The spirit of the dance

David Blake keeps up with the speed

La Compagnia di Danza di Torino; Cleopatra; Choreographer, Milorad Milskovitch; music by Luigi Mancinelli after the play by Pietro Cossa; decor and costumes by Eugenio Guglielminetti; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 1 December

Cleopatra, queen of queens, a constellation unique to herself among a host of small pedestrian stars and small fry crowns.

They have called her everything — a flying ship, a light-enchanted tropical fish, an alley-cat, a fake body stocking tried on by all the best Romans, a cigar. Shakespeare and Dryden enriched her legend as did a thousand others in opera and ballet.

And here she is in her most recent ballet apparition. How did the small Torino ballet group manage the legend? How did they manage it, in Cairo of all places, which is used to, and has come to terms with, its own snake goddess? In spite of small things they did well.

Limited resources were an obstacle overcome to advantage. They had two splendid men to dance Antonio and the Serpent's Spirit and a corps de ballet familiar with the work who were both energetic and understanding. The lighting, costumes and scenic effects were economical to the point of poverty but the production worked. And it worked because of the tact and feeling shown for the story of Milorad Milskovitch, and because of the music of Luigi Mancinelli — a courageous choice because almost anything would do to set alight the legend of Cleopatra. She was a monster fire-fly flashing through dark ages on her own volition.

Mancinelli's sounds, poured over the story, provided their own descriptive grandeur and, it must be said, glamour. The score is grandly orchestrated, recalling glories past and a crumbling present. It is like diving into a pool of warm molasses, an art deco cinema palace, sticky but overpoweringly stylish. Thanks to this sound we were in strange, exalted palaces where unmentionable goings-on were a daily occurrence.

And Cleopatra herself? She was an elegant and decadent freak but too weighty for the Serpent of Old Nile. Curves go well in some Cleopatras, Handel's for instance, but since there is so much flesh in Mancinelli's music, a few more bones and line would have suited this Cleopatra better.

The choreography was classical and not very inspired. Nothing post-modern, but then there was the Mancinelli musical signature which suggested mistresses and millionaires. Maybe better to be grateful we came so close to this moving story with so little grandeur to help the eye.

The opening was all black, almost in the dark. Black surroundings, serpents, fishes and spinners of fate all black. Decorative points of light suggesting vistas through endless space cloaked insect-like muses moving through archways that are really not there. We have to make them up ourselves: this audience creation was important and, though the audience response was limited, it was enthusiastic.

Long pas de deux for the principals suggesting the intense tensions on which empires, however golden, rest. *Antonio Russo in the role of Anthony* was from his first appearance right — force, power, physical splendour, great elevation and dramatic involvement all helped create, in a not very helpful dance movement, a character of historical proportions. This man could ride, fight, walk, dance all night and then, with Cleopatra, create legends of enduring love. Russo took the ballet. Loredana Furno as Cleopatra was heavy on the scales but dressed in white she looked regal, if not divine.

The sea was not forgotten. Waves and silver fishes cast a protective gauze over the torments of the lovers and the serpent was ever-present and baleful.

The end was simple; no heroics save Antony's lightening run onto and around the stage past black, threatening mysteries and his collapse into a lump of panting matter.

Cleopatra was a Greek. Because she knew what history would say of her, she kept to the script. Words are the mightiest. And this small, compact enjoyable ballet embodied them.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Great Symphonies (3): Debussy, Preludes a l'après-midi d'un faune; Aziz El-Shawan, Concerto no 1 in B flat major for piano and orchestra; Beethoven, Symphony no 7 in A major; Bengt-Ake Lundin, soloist piano; Ahmed El-Saedi, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 24 November

A strange, wonderful thing charged into the Opera at this concert — an ochre coloured stallion, Arab nostrils flaring, eyes staring, body muscles flexed for action. A romantic piece of musical Orientalism was about to commence. Date palms, Nile and desert — all these things shot past as the music of El-Shawan's first piano concerto was played. This should be heard more often. It is the most exciting Egyptian music heard in Cairo in many years.

It is in three clearly defined movements. The allegro was an allegro plus. The pianist of the performance was Bengt-Ake Lundin, fresh from his great European successes — a majestic pianist of a stamp and stature that these days is far from common. No flat hands, no tricks and flashes, no condescension, no muscle-man showing off, he's the real thing: powerful and with enough of everything in reserve to give the ultimate force.

The concerto is difficult but Lundin has always had the security and confidence to present himself as complete master. He took pleasure in the rushing and surging of the opening movement. What would he and El-Saedi do as the concerto continued? Plenty of everything, because this is a work made in the grand manner. The performance given surpassed all expectations.

The concerto's melodies are straightforward, they have the "follow through", are composed with cunning and give endless opportunities for the instrument to luxuriate. Professional composition — the piano is never left to fend for itself: it is first, last and in the middle. El-Shawan knows what he wants and goes for it with ease: Lisztian majesty and bravura demanding an immense range of tone. Maybe one must love the piano altogether to enjoy the concerto.

Couperin and Debussy are present but never plagiarised. This is original music though Rachmaninov sweeps through sometimes. Conceited, like a handsome creature preening in front of a full-length mirror, it is unashamedly macho — and why not? The entire edifice is successful. No one around at present could achieve in this genre such style.

Debussy's Faune, the midday one, had nothing of Bocklin about it. El-Saedi gave no gush or lush. It was Ingres-like lines and shapes. Faunes of a new order, 21st century ones, are arriving.

Adding to this concert's distinction was the 7th Symphony of Beethoven.

The first movement gave it all in a nutshell. Water gurgling, mountain brooks babbling, nothing long-winded, all fresh, tempos speeding but slowing on the curves. In the second movement, with the entry of the strings over deep basses, every bar sounded newly minted. When the trio came, it had no thuds. The third movement, with its geyser-like spouts of the celebration of elevation, the spirit of the dance, moved into the final, furious speed which brought this revelatory performance to an end. Never a huge sound, but a gleaming glowing dazzle. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra and its maestro did Cairo proud.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Sayed Yasin
Lobby of Al-Ahram Building, Al-Galaa St, Bulaq. Tel 578 6100/400. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 10 Dec.
Oil paintings and brasswork under the title "Sixth Sense".

Adel El-Siwi
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 15 Dec.

Timothy Keating
Sony Gallery, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel, 3575436. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 15 Dec.
Black and white photographs.

Group Exhibition
3 Addy St, Misaha Sq, Dokki. Tel 337 3736. Daily 5pm-10pm. Until 17 Dec.
Antique furniture, Moroccan woodwork, Syrian handicrafts and Fayoumi pottery by the pupils of Evelyne Porret and Michel Pastore under the title Nour Al-Zaman.

Kimberly Odekirk (Batik)
Al-Shomou' Gallery, Villa 12, Rd 150, Al-Horreya Sq, Maadi. Tel 350 0081. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 19 Dec.

Ange Khalil Helou
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 24 Dec.

Golo
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 25 Dec.
A cartoonist for several Egyptian magazines, Golo displays an installation of an Oriental café.

The Egypt of the Past
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 5pm-8.30pm. 13 Dec-7 Jan.
Photos of monuments and landscapes from the archives of Alberto Manodori and the Egyptian Museum of Torino.

Omar Hilal (Photography)
Lobby of the Jameel Center, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 354 2968. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 15 Jan.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour Al-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
An outstanding collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Manet and Rodin.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4.30pm, Fri 9am-11.30am, 1.30pm-4.30pm.
An outstanding collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures and the controversial mummies' room.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel. 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm, Fri 9am-11am, 1pm-4pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses the finest and largest collection of Coptic art and artefacts in the world.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab Al-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/ 390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm. Fri 9am-11.30am, 1.30pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork and coins, drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluk periods and other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt, from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of work by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr Al-Nil Bridge.

FILMS

Cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

Nile, River of the Gods
Ewart Hall, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 11 Dec, 11am.
Screening of the Discovery Channel's documentary film.

Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 341 5723. 10 Dec, 6pm.
Directed by Pablo Pasolini (1964).

French Films
French Cultural Centre, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824.
Van Gogh (1991), *7pm.*
Tango (1993), *7pm.*
La Griffe Et La Dent (1976), *7pm.*

Robocop
Odeon, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

The Flintstones
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Braveheart
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & midnight.

I Love Trouble
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Yom Har Geddan (A Very Hot Day)
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm, Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

MUSIC

Aureus Ensemble
Al-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 7 Dec, 8pm.
Performing works by Berwald, Schulhoff, Stamitz and Mozart.

Sarabande
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 7-9 Dec, 8pm.
Ballet performed by the stars of the Opera de Paris and the Cairo Opera.

Irish Guards
Al-Helmeiya Gardens, Helmeiya. 8 Dec, 2pm.

Yehia Khalil (Jazz)
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 8 Dec, 8pm.

The Drums Sing
Al-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 8 Dec, 8pm.
Conducted by Safwat Fathi, the Aghani Troupe performs.

Christmas Concert
Ewart Hall, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 9 Dec, 7pm.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 10 Dec, 8pm.

Cello Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 11 Dec, 8pm.
Ayman El-Hanbouli performs.

Piano Duet
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 12 Dec, 8pm.
Chantal de Salaberry and Sergei Edelmann perform.

"GOLO"

An Oriental Café

Choral Concert
Ewart Hall, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 13 Dec, 8pm.
The Cairo Choral Society, with soloists and orchestra, perform Dvorak's Te Deum and Puccini's Messe de Gloria.

THEATRE

La Locandiera (The Hotel-Keeper)
Al-Gomhouriya Theatre, 12 Al-Gomhouriya St, Downtown. 11 & 12 Dec, 8pm.
La Plautina di Roma presents director Sergio Ammirata's adaptation of this Carlo Goldoni play.

Al-Khashaba (The Plank)
Al-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 8pm. Until 18 Dec.
Starring Hussein El-Sherbini, the play is directed by Osama Fawzy.

Dastour Ya Siadna (With Your Permission, Masters)
Al-Fann, Ramses St. Tel 578 2444. Daily exc Mon, 9.30pm.

Hazz Nawa'em (Nawa'em's Luck)
Al-Houssaper, 16 Al-Ter'a Al-Boulaqeya St. Tel 769 233. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.

Al-Za'im (The Leader)
Al-Haram, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily exc Tues, 10pm, Mon & Fri 8pm.

Al-Gamila wal Wehshin (The Beautiful and the Ugly)
Al-Zamalek, 13 Shagaret Al-Dorr, Zamalek. Tel 341 0660. Daily 10.30pm, exc Fri 8.30pm.

Mama America
Qasr Al-Nil, Qasr Al-Nil St, Tahrir. Tel 575 0761. Daily exc Tues, 10pm. Mon 8pm.

Loaly
Balloon, Corniche Al-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily exc Tues, 9pm.

Ya Nas Efhamou (Try to Understand, People)
Floating Theatre, Fatma Rushdi St. Tel 363 8783. Daily 9.30pm.

Ra's Al-Dinuk (Cockerel Dances)
Miami, Talaat Harb St. Tel 767 086. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.

Bahloul fi Istanbul (Bahloul in Istanbul)
Hilton Ramsis, Corniche Al-Nil. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm, Sun 8pm.

La...Baizah Keda (None of That)
Al-Rihani, Emadeddin. Tel 591 3697. Daily exc Wed 10pm. Tues 8.30pm.

Hazzemni Ya...(Tie Me Up...)
Al-Gezira, Abdel-Aziz Al-Seoud, Manial. Tel 364 4160. Daily 10pm, Fri 8pm.

LECTURES

The Art of Conservation
Room 203, Rare Books And Special Collections Library, corner of Al-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5436. 7 Dec, 5pm.
Lecture by Nasri Iskander, general director of conservation, Supreme Council of Antiquities.

Ancient Baskets and Frozen Basket Makers?
Netherlands Institute for Archeology And Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 7 Dec, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Willeke Wendrich, Netherlands Institute for Archeology and Arabic Studies in Cairo.

Visions of Eternity: The Art of Tomb Decoration
Rare Books And Special Collections Library, as above. 10 Dec. 5.30pm.
Lecture by Cynthia Sheikholislami, AUC English Language Institute.

Meetings with Remarkable Personalities at The Egyptian Museum
Room 203, Rare Books And Special Collections Library, as above. 11 Dec, 6pm.
Lecture by Mohamed Saleh, director-general of the Egyptian Museum.

The Political Economy of Post Transitional South Africa
Blue Room, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 12 Dec, 4pm.
Lecture by W J Breutenbach, University of Stellenbosch, and Patrick Donai, economist consultant, South Africa.

Pharaon ou La Quête de L'Eternité
French Cultural Centre, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824. 12 Dec, 6.30pm.
Lecture by Christian Leblanc, director of the archeological mission in the Ramesseum.

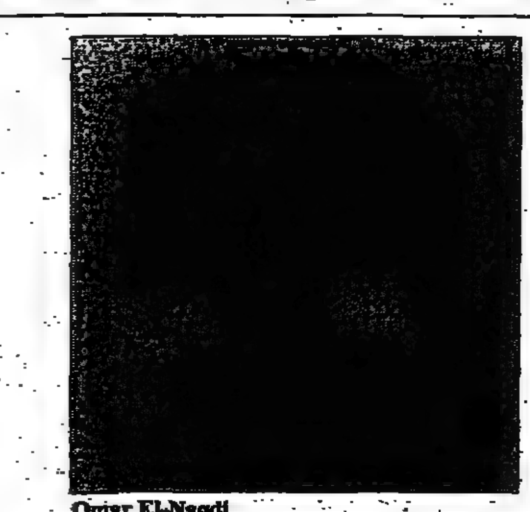
The Structure of the German Theatre
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. 13 Dec, 7pm.
Lecture by Gunther Beelitz, director of the National Theatre, Weimar.

Into The North Ibises: Recent Work at the Sacred Animal Necropolis, Saqqara
British Council, 192 Al-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319. 13 Dec, 7pm.
Lecture by Paul Nicholson, lecturer at the University of Cardiff, co-director of the Egypt Exploration Society Sacred Animal Necropolis Expedition.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Omar El-Nagdi

PAINTINGS, sculptures and drawings, 30 in all, by **Omar El-Nagdi** at **Salama Gallery** effortlessly synthesise elements from pharaonic, folkloric, Coptic and Islamic art into finished works that encompass elements from Egypt's ancient and modern history.

Abdel-Aziz Saab's portraits and bronze sculptures of artists including Faten Hamama and Naguib Mahfouz at **Extra Gallery** are psychologically dramatic and technically accomplished.

The 20 paintings of oases landscapes by **Hedayat El-Mallawani** in the **Opera Gallery** are colourful, vibrant and intense.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**



Shanghai secrets: The 19th Cairo International Film Festival enters its second and final week after solving its own Chinese puzzle

Feel the burn

Mohamed Shebl on the festival wind down



Italian actor/director Alberto Sordi, subject of a mini retrospective and, right, *Asphalt Devils*, Ossama Fawzi's 1995 production

With the 19th Cairo International Film Festival slowly drawing to a close, it is probably safe to do a general review and round up. To be sure, there are lessons to be learned. The festival is coming of age and many of those things which used to draw moans and groans have finally been done away with. And as we always say, in the end what remains will always be the films. And a lot of films there were — perhaps (is this heresy?) too many, wherein a lot of the confusion lies.

Officially, there were 230 feature length films spread over 24 movie theatres. There were bound to be discrepancies and spelling mistakes. But there were other mistakes of the more obvious kind, some of them totally unacceptable. Like how, in the second week of the festival, two films from the official competition were disqualified.

Apparently, Mr Wu Yigong, Chinese film director and member of the international jury, had pointed out that two films, the Brazilian *O Quatrilho* and the Spanish *Delmonte* had previously been screened in competition at the Shanghai Film Festival. This fact precluded their entry into another festival competition, no matter how geographically remote. The news came as a surprise because surely one member at least from the 51 members of the Higher Committee of the Festival, or the 27 members of the Film Selection Committee, must have noticed during their many travels to festivals — reported in the press to have cost LE 500,000 — or from the scores of publications and material available supposedly covering all and anything to do with cinema all around the globe, that these two films had been screened elsewhere and would eventually be disqualified. The Palestinian film was likewise excluded since it was suddenly remembered that it had been seen on, of all places, Egyptian television. Of course there was someone to argue that the telly had broadcast only 50 minutes of a 120 minute film.

Then there was the problem of film seminars which were generally ad hoc meetings that were either held or not. Many of these useful and sometimes vital gatherings were cancelled and the reasons announced to the press were sometimes quite outrageous. ("Mr so and so couldn't make it because he is on a tour of Khan Al-Khalili".) The press people, to put it mildly, were especially miffed when they couldn't get access to the real stars of the festival. People like Franco Zeffirelli were completely out of bounds. Which reminds me. During one of the saturation covering programmes of the festival, one of the announcers, apparently oblivious of the true identity of Zeffirelli, actually asked an Italian guest and coordinator on television just who he was, and having not caught the name kept referring to him as "this important personality". The guest protested and tried to explain that Zeffirelli had made such screen classics as The Taming of the Shrew, Romeo and Juliet, Jesus of Nazareth etc., to which the translation came "this important personality also made The Taming of the Shrew... etc."

But apart from the usual, predictable hiccups Cairo audiences got to see many important and controversial films which they otherwise would not have seen, films like Emir Kusturica's *Underground* (opening film), Michael Redford and Massino Troisi's *Il Postino* (The Postman), one of the most popular of the festival's films, Wolfram Paulus' *You're Driving Me Crazy*, Yannis Typaldos' *Terra Incognita*, Selma Baccar's *Habiba M'sike* or The Fire Dance, Giorgos Zervoulakos' *Orpheus Descending* (which I had seen earlier at the Thessaloniki Film Festival).

Some films had already been screened extensively and have been available on video tapes for years (*Arizona Dream* and Four *Weddings and a Funeral*, and Russia's *We are Jazzmen*, screened in Cairo more than a decade ago). Some films went down badly with Egyptian audiences like Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Delicatessen*, a film about a family of cannibals.

Another funny coincidence is that there are films that have "burn" in them. *Burning Heart*, and *Burning Life* both from Germany, *Burning Land* from Italy and *Burning Fire* from France.

It is amazing also that very little has been printed, if at all, that another super-star from Italy will be honoured at the closing ceremony. Actor and sometime director Alberto Sordi will be honoured at the culmination of a five-film mini-festival of his work.

The good news — as we go to print, there is still time to squeeze in a couple of good films before the festival closes.

Talking pictures

This is Khairi Bishara's second brush with the Cairo International Film Festival, Magdi Ahmed Ali's first. Both have films in competition this year. They speak to *Al-Ahram Weekly*

Khairi Bishara, director of *Isharet Morour* (Traffic Light)

"Beginning in 1988, my films started to adopt a different style from the one the public was accustomed to. Since then, the plots of my films have been centred on a certain situation through which the characters reveal themselves. During the critical moments that the situation imposes, the characters reveal their weaknesses, their frustrations and disappointments.

The 'situation' of this film is a major traffic jam: downtown... rush hour... a trivial accident... attempts at shortcuts out of the jam. Everything together. This pause in the flow of the traffic is parallel to a halt in the progress of the lives of the characters in general: a trumpet player, upon receiving a slap on the back of the neck, feels degraded and belittled despite his knowledge, talent and art. His girlfriend leaves him a letter saying she's emigrating to Australia in a few hours, dreading what might become of her if she stays. And what she dreads is exemplified in another character: an elegant woman appears and disappears mysteriously, sometimes undressing in the street. A university student follows an employee to a downtown store, buys her a sandwich and tries to kiss her. They get married as she had demanded but in a café rather than a church. They then go to a rooftop to consummate their marriage atop piles of newspapers. A history teacher, whose 15-year-old dream comes true when he finally becomes a father, describes his living conditions, which could really apply to the whole nation. A nurse sings at wedding parties to increase her income: she declares her rebellion against traditions and public convictions in a central square when she yells out her love manifesto: "Why do we fight loudly and love secretly? Love is not shameful or corrupt". Then there is the rural construction worker and football fanatic. He's funny, cheerful, despite his grief over a friend who died on his wedding night. This character is a simple person through whom I try to explain how low socio-economic status and goodness are not mutually-exclusive facts. These are but a few of the characters who get caught in the traffic jam and get to reveal some of their deepest, darkest and most sincere emotions.

I believe that the city, where all these different characters live, gets its magic from its inhabitants; individuals, seemingly isolated and lonely are brought together in this film by the mechanicality of life, by their fear of the future, creating a collective feeling of waiting and longing.

After the shooting of *Isharat Morour*, which was completed in early 1994, several technical problems delayed the post-shooting process. The entire soundtrack required remixing. I had started on a preliminary mixing but then stopped and had to shoot another script, adapting it to the same type of situational drama. A few months later I finished the zero version of the film and screened it before an invited audience. I then edited out some parts and raised the level of the background 'ambiance'. The whole soundtrack was remixed from A to Z.

I went on working overtime, for the first time in my career editing and mixing two films at the same time — *Isharet Morour* and *Qeshr Al-Bondoq* (Hazelnut Shells). I would sleep very little or not at all, and spend hours scrutinising every fragment of my work. I ended up with severe spinal problems that eventually led me to the intensive care unit for 10 days.

But this film was different; I was part of the characters and they were part of me. Being primarily a common man before being a film director makes me able to perceive a variety of types and stereotypes. I contain them within myself and try to express them casually, without prejudice or extreme subjectivity."

Khairi Bishara spoke with ***M. El-Assiouty***

Magdi Ahmed Ali, director of *Ya Donia Ya Gharami* (My Life...My Passion)

"My first contributions to cinema were feature documentaries. Some of my earliest attempts were *Zaman Al-Soqout* (The Time of Collapse) and *Hekayat Min Al-Zaman* (Stories from the Past), which were both feature documentaries; I actually participated with the latter in a German film festival. Then there was *Ayam Al-Insan Al-Sab'a* (The Seven Days of Man), and *Moulid Al-Sayed Al-Badawi*, which were also documentaries.

The film that is being shown at this year's Cairo Film Festival, *Ya Donia Ya Gharami*, is my first attempt at a long feature film. I tried very hard, and for a long time, to get a feature film produced, but the cinema situation in Egypt is absolutely terrible. However, before anyone assumes that my statement insinuates that the collapse of Egyptian cinema is around the corner — and many people are unfortunately convinced that this is the case — allow me to clarify one thing: Egyptian cinema *is* going through a period of crisis, yes, and yes, conditions have reached an all time low. Yet still I do not believe that this is the beginning of the end of Egyptian cinema.

As a matter of fact, that this film was produced, by Ra'fat El-Mihi, constitutes proof that there is hope.

Contrary to what some people reported, Ra'fat El-Mihi never intended to direct my film. He produced it because he liked the script. It was all a matter of coincidence. Ra'fat was trying to pull a film production company together at the time of the completion of the script, which he read when he met Hussein Al-Qalla, the producer who had initially intended to undertake the project. El-Mihi liked the script, and that's how things happened.

Some may wonder why I directed a film based on someone else's script while I had written a script that someone else directed — Tarek El-Telmesani's *Dehk Wa Le'b Wa Gadd Wa Hob* (Laughter, Play, Seriousness and Love). The answer to this question is very simple: the person who wrote my film's script is not just 'someone else' he is my best friend, my childhood friend and my life companion. We had always been very close as children, and even when he joined the Faculty of Law and I the Faculty of Pharmacy, we never lost touch. I respect his ideas, I understand him and he understands me; we are on the same wave length. The man is Mohamed Helmi Helal. Not only is he my soulmate but he is also a very good scriptwriter. I really don't feel someone else wrote the script, I feel I did.

Luck has been on this film's side since the beginning. The scriptwriter is my best friend, the producer is someone I respect, and the film is featuring in the main competition of the festival. It was the poor screening conditions at the time of the completion of the film that forced me to delay releasing the film publicly. There simply were no cinemas available. Then Saadeddin Wahba, head of the festival, saw the film and liked it. He told me he wanted to delay its release until the festival, and Ra'fat El-Mihi, who also loved the film, agreed with him. I am quite lucky to have my directorial debut in the competition of the festival.

Egypt is full of actors, producers, directors, scriptwriters, cinematographers and editors who just love the cinema. Many of these people are willing to work in productions that are fated to lose. Many of them are ready to invest money, either in production or by getting less wages than they know they should; and all this merely in the hope that cinema will overcome the current crisis and prosper once more. Artists in this country are different from artists in any other part of the world. They are passionate people who love their work and are not yet ready to witness its death."

Magdi Ahmed Ali spoke with ***Injy El-Kashef***

Plain Talk

Whenever the issue of state support of the arts is raised, a corollary question automatically arises: who benefits from these subsidies and who enjoys the arts subsidised by the taxpayer? These questions, in turn, lead to the polemic surrounding the idea of "elitist audiences".

Critics and creative writers in Britain and the US have been criticising the Arts Council in the former and the Endowment of the Arts in the latter for their bias towards highbrow arts, namely opera, ballet and classical music. Popular newspapers in Britain, for instance, have been leading a vehement campaign against this elitism. One paper wanted to find out about the type of person who goes to the opera. Three of its editors were promptly dressed in black tie —the assumption being that this is the attire of the opera going elite — and off they went to Covent Garden. To their dismay and disappointment, they discovered that they were the only ones in the packed house so formally dressed. Most people there were in jeans. Their anti-elitism campaign was thus discredited.

We are currently facing this issue, with a different twist, in Egypt. The questions here are: why is the ordinary man not a frequenter of the opera house and why does the opera house attract such small audiences?

Looking at the ambitious programme of the Cairo Opera House, one cannot but admire the efforts of its chairman Dr. Nasser El-Ansari and its director Samir Zaki to bring the best of world art to Egypt. It is the job of the Opera to provide a space for the high arts, but it cannot be responsible for creating a taste for these arts.

There seems to be a psychological barrier between the common man and the high arts epitomised by opera, ballet and classical music. The Opera House seems like an impregnable fortress requiring a password for entry. This password is education in the arts, something sorely lacking in our current system of education.

The neglect of the arts by the educational system has been the subject of much analysis and criticism. The latest report of the National Specialised Council for Culture, Arts, Literature and Information deals precisely with this issue and comes up with some important recommendations like "supplying schools with the most advanced means of art education and the use of audio-visual aids in the creation of artistic taste" with the view of "developing artistic awareness and taste among the people".

With innovation in art education, the common man can become part of the so-called elite and overcome the psychological barrier between himself and the high arts. In this respect I invoke the famous motto of the Irish literary revival of Yeats, Lady Gregory and others: "We shall present what is of high quality until it becomes popular".

Mursi Saad El-Din

Festival programme

Thursday, 7 December

Cheops Conference Hall
9am: Bidoni (Italy)
12pm: The Gravet Brothers (France)
3pm: The Asphalt Devils (Egypt)
6.30pm: Bidoni (Italy)
9.30pm: The Gravet Brothers (France)
Cairo Sheraton
10.30am: An Italian in America (Italy)
3.30pm: Monica (Belgium)
6.30pm: Four Weddings And A Funeral (UK)
9.30pm: Halgato (Slovania)
Tahrir
10.30am: Barine Daughter As A Peasant Woman (Russia)
3.30pm: Elisa (France)
6.30pm: A Bronx Tale (USA)
9.30pm: Vukovar...Poste Restante (former Yugoslavia)
Radio
10.30am: The Museum of Sunken Loves (Turkey)
3.30pm: At The Height of Summer (Poland)
6.30pm: Hope And Glory (UK)
9.30pm: Confessions (France)
Karim
10.30am: Broken Silence (Switzerland)
3.30pm: Romeo Is Bleeding (USA)
6.30pm: Between Summers (Sweden)
9.30pm: Land of Milk And Honey (USA)
Al-Haram
10.30am: The Trees (Poland)
3.30pm: House of Silence (Switzerland)
6.30pm: Poison (Italy)
9.30pm: Jenipapo (Brazil)
MGM
12.30pm: Jonathan Of The Bears (Italy)
3.30pm: Last Ride (Italy)
6.30pm: Terra Incognita (Greece)
9.30pm: Last Ride (Italy)
Cosmos I
10.30am: London's Burning (Italy)
2.30pm: Flickering Roads (Germany)
6.30pm: Tell Laura I Love Her (Spain)
9.30pm: A Good Man In Africa (USA)
Cosmos II
10.30am: Solo Sunny (Germany)
2.30pm: La Vengeance D'Une Blonde (France)
6.30pm: Stars (Italy)
9.30pm: La Vengeance D'Une Blonde (France)
Rivoli
10.30am: The Good Italians (Italy)
3.30pm: Because You're A Woman (South Korea)
6.30pm: Complications In The Night (Italy)
9.30pm: Once Beaten Twice Shy (Netherlands)
Roxy
10.30am: Half Of A Life (Germany)
3.30pm: A Marital Comedy (Poland)
6.30pm: The Big Race (USA)
9.30pm: The Innocent (USA)
Normandy
10.30am: Indian Summer (Czech Republic)
3.30pm: You're Driving Me Crazy (Austria)
6.30pm: Beyond Rangoon (UK)
9.30pm: Belmonte (Spain)
Miami
10.30am: Josephine, The Singer And The Mice People (Ukraine)
3.30pm: Strange Stories (Italy)
6.50pm: Mother's Boys (USA)
9.30pm: Oasis (Italy)
Cairo
10.30am: Whose Side Are You On (Italy)
3.30pm: AWOL (Poland)
6.30pm: Blue In You (South Korea)
9.30pm: The Rebellious Years (Italy)

Friday, 8 December

Cheops Conference Hall
9am: Once Upon A Time (Algeria)
12pm: Burning Life (Germany)
3pm: Railway Junction (Egypt)
6.30pm: Once Upon A Time (Algeria)
9.30pm: Burning Life (Germany)
Cairo Sheraton
10.30am: Hope And Glory (UK)
3.30pm: Arizona Dream (USA/France)
6.30pm: Citizen X (USA)
9.30pm: Racing Demon (France)
Tahrir
10.30am: The Flor Contemplacion Story (Philippines)
3.30pm: The Gravet Brothers (France)
6.30pm: Unstrung Heroes (USA)
9.30pm: Gangs (Italy)
Radio
10.30am: Barine Daughter As A Peasant Woman (Russia)
3.30pm: Bidoni (Italy)
6.30pm: Between Summers (Sweden)
9.30pm: The Big Race (USA)
Karim
10.30am: Ascending The Rain (Syria)
3.30pm: Beyond Rangoon (UK)
6.30pm: The Hunters (Italy)
9.30pm: Vukovar...Poste Restante (former Yougoslavia)
Al-Haram
10.30am: La vengeance D'Une Blonde (France)
3.30pm: Scenes From The New World (USA)
6.30pm: La Vengeance D'Une Blonde (France)
9.30pm: Scenes From The New World (USA)
MGM
12.30pm: Monica (Netherlands)
3.30pm: Halgato (Slovania)
6.30pm: The Land of Milk And Honey (USA)
9.30pm: Halgato (Slovenia)
Cosmos I
10.30am: AWOL (Poland)
3.30pm: Complications In The Night (Italy)
6.30pm: Death And The Maiden (USA/France)
9.30pm: Heat Wave (Italy)
Cosmos II
10.30am: Romeo Is Bleeding (USA)
3.30pm: Terra Incognita (Greece)



Poison (Italy), dir. Bruno Bigoni

6.30pm: Romeo Is Bleeding (USA)
9.30pm: Terra Incognita (Greece)
Rivoli
10.30am: Presumed Suspect (Greece)
3.30pm: Terra Bruciata (Italy/Switzerland)
6.30pm: Cofessions (France)
9.30pm: Jenipapo (Brazil)
Roxy
10.30am: Whose Side Are You On (Italy)
3.30pm: Tale Of The Three Jewels (Palestine)
6.30pm: Belmonte (Spain)
9.30pm: A Boy Called Hate (Canada)
Normandy
10.30am: An Italian In America (Italy)
3.30pm: Il Postino (Italy)
6.30pm: A Good Man In Africa (USA)
9.30pm: The Innocent (USA)
Miami
10.30am: Delicatessen (France)
3.30pm: Babylon (Italy)
6.30pm: Elisa (France)
9.30pm: Rebellious Years (Italy)
Cairo
10.30am: Chance (Poland)
3.30pm: Strange Stories (Italy)
6.30pm: All Men Are Liars (Australia)
9.30pm: A Bronx Tale (USA)

Saturday, 9 December

Cairo Sheraton
10.30am: Solo Sunny (Germany)
3.30pm: Elisa (France)
6.30pm: Passionate Kiss (Slovania)
9.30pm: Vukovar...Poste Restante (former Yugoslavia)
Tahrir
10.30am: London's Burning (Italy)
3.30pm: Burning Life (Germany)
6.30pm: Il Postino (Italy)
9.30pm: Citizen X (USA)
Radio
10.30am: Absolution (India)
3.30pm: Dolores Clairborne (USA)
6.30pm: Heat Wave (Italy)
9.30pm: The Last Good Time (USA)
Karim
10.30am: Terra Bruciata (Italy/Switzerland)
3.30pm: The Flor Contemplacion Story (Philippines)
6.30pm: Confessions (France)
9.30pm: A Boy Called Hate (Canada)
Al-Haram
10.30am: The Madness of Giselle (Russia)
3.30pm: The Land Of Milk And Honey (USA)
6.30pm: Indian Summer (Czech Republic)
9.30pm: The Land Of Milk And Honey (USA)
MGM
12.30pm: O'Quatrilho (Brazil)
3.30pm: Acapulco Rock (France)
6.30pm: Beyond Rangoon (UK)
9.30pm: Acapulco Rock (France)
Cosmos I
10.30am: Because You're A Woman (South Korea)
3.30pm: Monica (Netherlands)
6.30pm: You're Driving Me Crazy (Austria)
9.30pm: Gangs (Italy)
Cosmos II
10.30am: 1942: A Love Story (India)
3.30pm: Poison (Italy)
6.30pm: Mother's Boys (USA)
9.30pm: Poison (Italy)
Rivoli
10.30am: Josephine, The Singer And The Mice People (Ukraine)
3.30pm: Whose Side Are You On (Italy)
6.30pm: The Innocent (USA)
9.30pm: Four Weddings And A Funeral (UK)
Roxy
10.30am: Ascending The Rain (Syria)
3.30pm: Barine Daughter As A Peasant Woman (Russia)
6.30pm: Bidoni (Italy)
9.30pm: A Bronx Tale (USA)
Normandy
10.30am: Strange Stories (Italy)
3.30pm: The Gravet Brothers (France)
6.30pm: Hope And Glory (UK)
9.30pm: Jenipapo (Brazil)
Miami
10.30am: An Italian In America (Italy)
3.30pm: At The Height Of Summer (Poland)
6.30pm: House of Silence (Switzerland)
9.30pm: A Good Man In Africa (USA)
Cairo
10.30am: The Elder Daughter (Sri Lanka)
3.30pm: Assassination Of The Tzar (Russia)
6.30pm: The Spinning Wheel Of Time (Poland)
9.30pm: The Hunters (Italy)

Sunday, 10 December

Cairo Sheraton
10.30am: Dolores Clairborne (USA)
3.30pm: La Vengeance D'Une Blonde (France)
6.30pm: Colour Of Night (USA)
9.30pm: Acapulco Rock (France)
Tahrir
10.30am: Stars (Italy)
3.30pm: Heat Wave (Italy)
6.30pm: A Boy Called Hate (Canada)
9.30pm: The Innocent (USA)
Radio
10.30am: Chance (Poland)
3.30pm: The Desperate Trail (USA)
6.30pm: House Of Silence (Switzerland)
9.30pm: Vukovar...Poste Restante (former Yugoslavia)
Karim
10.30am: Whose Side Are You On (Italy)
3.30pm: The Gravet Brothers (France)
6.30pm: Complications In The Night (Italy)
9.30pm: Citizen X (USA)
Al-Haram
10.30am: Witness Again (Hungary)
3.30pm: O'Quatrilho (Brazil)
6.30pm: Beyond Rangoon (UK)
9.30pm: Confessions (France)
MGM
12.30pm: The Madness Of Giselle (Russia)
3.30pm: A Good Man In Africa (USA)
6.30pm: Racing Demon (France)
9.30pm: Passionate Kiss (Slovania)
Cosmos I
10.30am: An Italian In America (Italy)
3.30pm: Radio Doc (Slovania)
6.30pm: Hope And Glory (UK)
9.30pm: A Bronx Tale (USA)
Cosmos II
10.30am: Jenipapo (Brazil)
3.30pm: The Last Good Time (USA)
6.30pm: Jenipapo (Brazil)
9.30pm: The Last Good Time (USA)
Rivoli
10.30am: AWOL (Poland)
3.30pm: Bidoni (Italy)
6.30pm: Burning Life (Germany)
9.30pm: All Men Are Liars (Australia)
Roxy
10.30am: London's Burning (Italy)
3.30pm: Play For A Passenger (Russia)
6.30pm: La Vengeance D'Une Blonde (France)
9.30pm: The Hunters (Italy)
Normandy
10.30am: Letters From Alou (Spain)
3.30pm: The Last Good Time (USA)
6.30pm: Unstrung Heroes (USA)
9.30pm: Romeo Is Bleeding (USA)
Miami
10.30am: Museum Of The Sunken Loves (Turkey)
3.30pm: Assassination Of The Tzar (Russia)
6.30pm: Barine Daughter As A Peasant Woman (Russia)
9.30pm: The Land Of Milk And Honey (USA)
Cairo
10.30am: Absolution (India)
3.30pm: Monica (Netherlands)
6.30pm: Top Dog (Poland)
9.30pm: The Big Race (USA)

Cheops Conference Hall: Nasr City. Tel 263 4632.
Cairo Sheraton: Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081.
Tahrir: 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 472.
Radio: 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562.
Karim: 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830.
Al-Haram: 174 Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 386 3952.
MGM: Kolleyat Al-Nasr Sq. Maadi. Tel 352 3066.
Cosmos I & II: 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537.
Rivoli: 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053.
Roxy: Roxy Sq. Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344.
Normandy: 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254.
Miami: 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656.
Cairo: 4 Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 574 5350.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, past experience suggests that changes in the programmes are likely to occur. It is therefore advisable to check with venues first.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef*** *and [illegible]*

High-tech reading for the kids

The twelfth children's book fair is an occasion to reconsider the standard of children's books. **Gihan Shahine** *visits the fair*



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Last week, Farouk Hosni, minister of culture inaugurated the Twelfth Children's Book Fair of the Egyptian General Book Authority organised under the auspices of Mrs Mubarak. Currently held at the Nasr City Exhibition Grounds till 6 December, *the fair exhibits one and half a million* copies of 2,000 books from 7,000 publishing houses. 32 countries, including Japan, India, France, England, the United States, Germany, Spain, Italy, Lebanon and Palestine, are also taking part in the exhibition.

"The fair carries a lot of significance this year," says Yaqoub El-Sharouni, a well-known writer of children stories. "For the first time ever, the Giza library affiliated to the Comprehensive Care Association, issued a magazine all written and drawn by the children themselves, and the magazine is now put on show in the fair."

Actually, the magazine is not the only achievement in the field of children's literature and education. A story writing and drawing competition was announced two weeks before the fair. During the inauguration ceremony the best 12 entries received prizes ranging from *LE1,000* to 3,000, 9 for children's stories and three for drawings.

"All the winning entries show talent which needs to be constantly encouraged," comments El-Sharouni.

It seems El-Sharouni's enthusiasm is an echo of the fair's active ambiance. While education experts and writers gather in a four- day series *of seminars, discussing children's literature*, education and the use of multi-media in that field, crowds of parents browse through the books on offer, while children enjoy a good time at the cinema watching cartoons or the puppet show held at the fair theater.

"The fair shows an increasing public awareness of the importance of reading in the child's life," says Abdel-Badie El-Qamhawi, presenter of a popular radio programme designed to eradicate illiteracy. "In a country where official statistics show *half its population to be illiterate, it* is nice to see that even those who cannot afford books show curiosity about the world around them."

In one of the pavilions, students at the recently established kindergarten college are exhibiting some new educational devises which they have created themselves. Some of their educational *programmes are stored on CDs.*

"The college is exerting serious efforts in updating teaching facilities for young children, some of which are probably excellent imitations of costly foreign objects," says Maher Ismail, retired officer and father of six young children. But since most of the articles on sale at the fair are not affordable for most parents like Ismail, he just feels content to have a look at the objects and tries *to imitate* them using *simple* materials.

But whereas Ismail can imitate drawings, puzzles, puppets, high-tech gadgets are another matter. It seems like the media is on its way to replace books in the educational field, but whether Egypt is ready for that change remains open to question. According to a study by Hassan Shehata, professor at the Faculty of Education, conducted on a sample of 100 families living in Heliopolis, 71 per cent of children own computers, 56 per cent of them use them for amusement, 28 per cent for *both amusement* and education and only 15 per cent for education.

"To input the education syllabus on CDs we need experts proficient both in education and in computer science. So the changeover is not for tomorrow," predicts El-Sharouni.

As books are still the main educational facility it is important to maintain a high standard. *According to a recent study a committee of university* professors and literati conducted on a sample of 460 books presented by 18 publishing houses between *1990* and *1994*, only *77* books representing the low percentage of 16.8 were considered good. Shehata, who also took part in the evaluation, explains that most books are very rich in content but it is the approach that is defective. "Most writers cram children's minds *with information*, thus *giving* no chance to the child to think for himself," says Shehata. According to him, "some books are over simplified and most writers still *stick* to the children's beloved animals as traditional heroes in children's fairy tales, the matter which limits the child's imagination and creativity."

El-Sharouni, however, insists that children's books are significantly improving. "Now there is a new collection of music books where the child pushes a button and listens to sound effects that *tune with the story," El-Sharouni says.* "These books are much more effective than the normal ones since they engage the child's three senses of touching, listening and seeing."

Still, considering that one music book costs LE90, its benefits will be confined to a very limited number of children who can afford it.

But Malak Louka, a children's story writer, *thinks the fair is a good chance to learn new* writing techniques, to up-date Egyptian books and present a good quality book at a much lower price.

Watching them grow

In the context of the UN convention on the protection of the child (1989-1999), the Egyptian government has conducted a study which aims to determine the criteria crucial to the growth and development of preschool children. **Reem Leila** reports

For the first time in Egypt and in cooperation with the *UN* Development Programme (UNDP), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) represented in the Association for Health Improvement, the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood *(NCMC) has formulated a number* of criteria for assessing the psychological and physical development and growth of children between two and six years of age.

Dr Amina El-Guindi, secretary-general of the NCMC, discussed these criteria in the context of the directives issued by the Technical Counselling Committee, chaired by Mrs Mubarak, which emphasise the need to attach greater importance to the development of very young children. Social, psychological, and medical studies were conducted taking into account the context of the social environment in which each individual child was brought up.

El-Guindi said that these studies were *applied* on samples chosen from Cairo as a first stage, followed by other stages in the rest of Egypt's governorates.

The first section of the three-volume study, prepared by sociologists and university professors under the supervision of the NCMC, deals with children's quality of life. The main *objective of this first section is* to determine the social and economic dimensions of children's growth and parent's role in upbringing. The role of *mass* media and cultural institutions are examined in terms of their role in forming the child's character and creating feelings of belonging to the country. The study also seeks to draw the government's attention to the *importance of providing the 9.2* per cent of handicapped children with more care than is presently available.

The second volume, considered to be the most important part of the whole study, deals with the psychological elements in the development and growth of the pre-school child, and suggests ways to detect any *disturbance* or *retardation in* growth and development at an early stage, taking into account individual variations. This section lays *down guidelines to* help parents deal constructively with their children's problems.

The third volume, devoted to health, includes criteria for the growth of the child in terms of height, weight and circumference of the head. This section is *intended to alert the parents of* malnourished or under-developed children to the health dangers to which the children might be exposed. These criteria were elaborated mainly on the basis of the children's medical history. Women were also examined in an attempt to determine whether the mothers of malnourished children had suffered from any *diseases* during pregnancy. This third section emphasised the importance of caring for mothers-to-be, since *women's health is a crucial factor* in that of their children. Early detection of potential dangers to children's health and normal growth will help avoid many children problems at later stages in life. Respiratory system diseases among children were a *particular focus*, and the *study* called for campaigns to increase awareness of these diseases and how to prevent them. The study also emphasised the importance of providing children with a healthy diet, and indicated the possibility of doing so on a limited income.

The document concluded by stressing the importance of future *studies, to be carried out* on the basis of a much larger sample in order to establish national standards for children's *development. Mothers' awareness* of child-rearing techniques should be increased, it added, by teaching them skills related to children's social, psychological, and physical growth. Mass media also has a role to play in raising parents' awareness *of harmful child-rearing* practices. The educational system is another obvious target for awareness-raising programmes which would help both parents and teachers create an atmosphere suitable to the development of children's potential. The study also called for the establishment of special programmes run by the most qualified teachers *to help* educationally challenged children of different ages cope with life.

Pot Pourri

Smile, after the beep

Our bureaucracy has an appalling reputation, rivaled only by *the state of our traffic*. This is nothing new. Innumerable travelers and historians, Arab and foreign, have testified to this fact. The simplest, most trivial administrative paper is obtained *only* after a descent into an alien world which would make Kafka blush.

One day I plan to write little guides on *"How to Renew Your Car License in 54 Easy Steps", "How to Obtain* an Official Birth Certificate without Committing Murder", etc.

Personally, however, I have little to complain about. My frequent dealings with the administrative powers have erred on the pleasant side — so far. This is because from a tender age I observed my mother's technique in dealing with bureaucrats, and later did my best to emulate her.

My mother has always been known for getting what she wants with a minimum of inconvenience — to her. Now her attitude in real life is akin to that of a commander-in-chief reviewing the troops. She takes no nonsense from anybody and *has never been into* social *follow-the-leader games*. Yet her toughness and arrogance used to melt instantaneously the moment she set foot in an administrative building. She would visibly wither as she crossed the *threshold, appear meek* and mild to the most hawk-like eyes, falter and blush in positively delicate fashion, and generally convey the impression that she was in need of urgent attention. Employees would dash from behind counters, extend chairs — often their own — and bend backwards to accommodate the lady. If she tipped at all, she was never guilty of excess, yet she achieved more than anyone we knew in record time. Somehow she managed to impart the *impression that attending* to *her desires* was the right thing to do, a little like a sacred duty.

When my turn came I automatically copied her act. I smiled a lot and made sure I looked helpless. *With time I refined* my moves, often asking questions to which I knew the answer just to prove my ineptitude, and thereby giving the employees in charge a chance to feel important. I gave him/her my undivided attention and made sure to slip in a sentence about how busy I knew he/she was and how grateful I was for a snippet of his/her time. Soon we would be talking about his/her difficulties, the children, the in-laws and how he/she had *not been dealt one of life's fair hands. In no time I would be* out, clutching the coveted document and having left a friend behind.

"That is because you and your mother have the knack of establishing the feudal connections," says my daughter. She would never use such tactics, she assures me. But where is the harm? A few years ago, when telephones were a rare commodity, my line was suddenly "borrowed" by someone probably moving in higher circles than I. I went to pay the telephone administration a visit. Eventually I was led to Madame Aisha's office. She explained that it would take months to retrieve the line. I explained why it had to be done on the spot. I convinced her that I needed a telephone so badly that she couldn't possibly deprive me of it a day longer. We had several glasses of tea and began to chat. She invited me to share her lunch, which we washed down with more glasses of tea before conversing idly a little more. She never suggested a bribe and I didn't think it proper to extend any. Finally I left. "Go home," she said, "and call me tomorrow." In the afternoon my telephone was in perfect order. *The next day I called to* thank her. Years later I called the telephone complaints department. A woman answered to whom I explained what the trouble was. *"How is your older daughter?"* she asked. "Still in America?" It was Madame Aisha — and needless to say my request was immediately attended to.

I can think of dozens of similar incidents. I know people in most administrations now — and when I don't, I make time to *establish personal relationships.*

Not long ago, at three o'clock in the morning, I placed an international call through a business service. After checking my telephone number the *attendant* asked me how my daughter was. He had been to school with her. After the call was completed, he called back to inquire if everything was to my satisfaction and asked when I would want him to send someone around for the money. "Any time," I told him. "Well, it is *almost the end of the month," he said shyly, "and if you want* me to delay the bill till the beginning of next month, just say so...."

Probably by the time my daughter has to deal with administrative matters, all this will belong to the past. Technology will have taken over and, having been reduced to a code number, she will not have to rely on her charm to get by on the bureaucratic circuit. It will all be cold, impersonal and *efficient. Personally I will always have a soft spot for* administrative ineffectiveness. It is a sign that employees are human and fallible, and not necessarily endowed with evil powers; that on the contrary, with the right kind of approach, they are usually prepared to help against all odds. I shudder to think that the day will come when a disembodied voice will mechanically inform me that my telephone is out of order and I won't be able to answer back; when the cry of "please, please don't do that to me, you don't know how much I miss my morning chat with my mother," will only illicit a stupid repeat performance of the message. Forget the twenty-first *century — I'll take Madame Aisha any day.*

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Baked pumpkin

Ingredients:

One pumpkin (2-4 kilos)
1 Cup of sugar for every kilo of pumpkin weighed
after skinning and removing seeds
1 kilo of milk
3 tbsp of flour
1/4 kilo of dried raisins
1/4 kilo of crushed hazelnuts
200 grms of butter
Vanilla, bread crumbs

Method:

Peel the pumpkin, remove the seeds and cut in cubes, then weigh, and accordingly the sugar. Place the pumpkin cubes in a large cooking pan then pour over them the sugar and leave covered overnight. Place the pan over medium heat and leave to cook in its own juices, until the cubes are very tender. Remove from heat and pour into a strainer with a container underneath to save the *juices*. Leave until cubes are drained, then mash them well. In another pan, make a "béchamel" *sauce liquefying it* by the pumpkin juice. Remove from heat and stir in the vanilla. Coat a *baking pan with butter and sprinkle* some bread crumbs. Place half the quantity of mashed pumpkin, then add the nuts and raisins, then add the other half. Pat evenly with a spatula. Bake in a preheated oven (medium heat) only until top is honey glowed.

Serve warm.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Tricks of the memory

Nigel Ryan *takes a dose of the past*

Few things lend *themselves to nostalgia quite* like food. And in the great game of remembrance of meals past, restaurants become the *keepers* of an impossible flame. *It* is a thankless task, one that only the mad or the sainted would willingly undertake.

Several people have mentioned Al-Lokanda Al-Omoumeya to me and most of their accounts have reeked of nostalgia. Someone even went so far as to suggest that the restaurant was like their grandmother's sitting room. Well, it certainly isn't like my grandmother's sitting room, god rest her soul. Nor is it quite as cosy as the description would have you believe.

Al-Lokanda Al-Omoumeya takes some finding. It is located just off Qasr Al-Nil, beyond Midan Mustafa Kamel, in Sekket Al-Manakh, *the final narrow* alleyway *before Qasr Al-Nil* peters out into Midan Opera. The facade is nondescript. There is a large glass window and a beaded *curtain over the door. No sign, no obvious* soliciting of customers.

The interior is plain. The only decoration is a large mural *of a mountain lake and a smaller*, photographic portrait of President Mubarak. The tables are sparse, and their only concession to dining room status are the purple napkins, carefully rolled into cones and set on alternate plates. There is no menu, so you have to ask the waiter. There is sawdust on the floor.

Does this justify the nostalgia? One suspects that there used to be far more establishments like Al-Lokanda Al-Omoumeya in Cairo. The food served is simple, and it is presented without fuss. Indeed, fussiness is the last thing you would associate with the place. The waiter reels off the available dishes, you make your choice, and within five minutes everything is set on the table. First come the bread and salads. On the day I lunched there a dish of *baba ganough* and a mixed *salad* were placed unceremoniously before me. The latter consisted of an aubergine stuffed with garlic and lemon juice paste, pickled turnip, *gargir*, tomatoes smeared in the same garlic paste as the aubergine and topped with shredded lettuce. Nothing spectacular, but perfectly respectable. I ordered pigeon, something with which I have a schizophrenic, love-hate relationship, my companion chicken. Both arrived a few minutes after the salads.

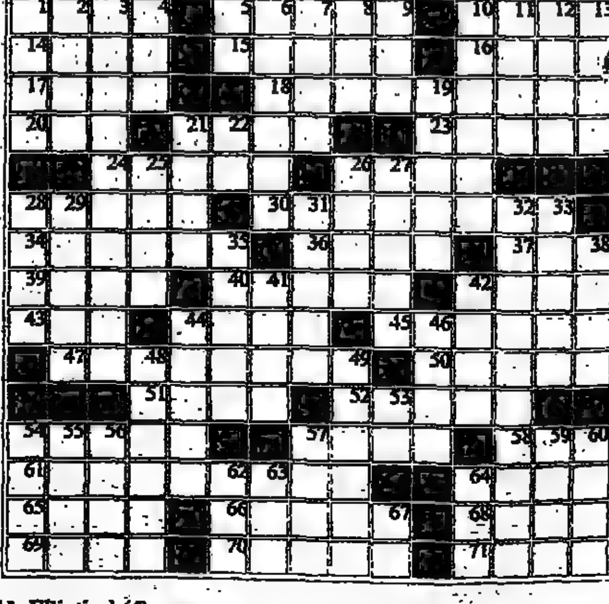
It would be misleading to suggest that there is anything à la carte about this kind of catering. The food is prepared before opening time, and the customer takes his chance. If you lunch late, things will have been standing around for a while. Obviously it is best to arrive early. As *it was, by three o'clock in the afternoon the pi*geon was passable, the chicken dry as a bone.

Perhaps it is my own nostalgia that makes me *order pigeon. Invariably I think plump* pigeon breasts cooked slightly rare, with just a hint of pink oozing from the flesh. But alas, local pigeons are a scrawny *affair*, always *stringy*, often tough. The pigeon at Al-Lokanda Al-Omoumeya was stuffed with wheat and garlic, which gave the *illusion* of plumpness and made of the paltry thing a meal. The chicken, which had been boiled before being baked, was served with rice, an ambitious ploy given the dryness of the thing. Between us we shared a dish of potatoes, cooked, I presume, in chicken stock, with garlic and onions. This was a necessary side order, since it provided the liquor that made the chicken and rice palatable. With soft drinks — Al-Lokanda Al-Omoumeya is not licensed — the bill came to LE35.

Al-Lokanda Al-Omoumeya, 4, Sekket El-Manakh (off Qasr Al-Nil), Downtown. Tel: 391 0617

Al-Ahram Weekly Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



ACROSS

1. Solo song (4)
5. Throng (5)
10. Hangs limply (4)
14. Peripheries (4)
15. Tanker (5)
16. Baking chamber (4)
17. Goblins (4)
18., Large town scenery (9)
20. Actress Sandra (3)
22. Born and ...., by birth and upbringing (4)
23. Tempo; beans, lentils or peas (5)
24. Less common (5)
26. Bleats (4)
28. Work at loom (5)
30. Celibate (8)
34. Prolongs (6)
36. Willowy (4)
37. Pinch (3)
39. Sacred bull of Ancient Egyptians (4)
40. 1/16 of drachma, pl. (5)
42. Attar (4)
43. Accelerate (3)
44. Celebes wild ox (4)
45. Each of two (6)
47. Slenderness (8)
50. Submerge (5)
51. Hypocrite; Ananias (4)
52. Jumping movements in skating, pl. (5)
54. Ring shaped coral reef enclosing lagoon (5)
57. Romans' buildings for musical performances (4)
58. Nickname of an American President (3)
61. Type of jazz with two-beat rhythm and collective improvisation (9)
64. A northern European (4)
65. On the sheltered side (4)
66. Hare-brained (5)
68. Functions (4)
69. Repair (4)
70. Dehydrator (5)
71. Foreboding (4)

DOWN

1. Barren 94)
2. Frost especially formed from fog (4)
3. Essential (10)
4. Moke (3)
5. Prefix meaning "jointly": (2)
6. Kitchen gadget, pl. (6)
7. Fetid (4)
8. Damp (3)
9. Opposite of 8 down (3)
10. Grasshopper (6)
11. Elliptical (4)
12. Verves (4)
13. Dutch knife (4)
19. Convulsion (5)
21. Light-weight quick-firing machine gun (4)
22. Musical note (2)
25. Hails (4)
26. Invoice (4)
27. Plant with aromatic seeds (5)
28. Don (4)
29. Banish (5)
31. Either of two hip-muscles, ... magnus or ....parvus (5)
32. Eagerness (10)
33. Ceremonies (5)
35. Portuguese lady (5)
38. Orifice (4)
41. Dutch South African (4)
42. Loot, jumbled (4)
44. Imbecile (5)
46. Concept (4)
48. United (6)
49. Horse rider's seat (6)
53. Symbol for "xenon" (2)
54. Abel's father (4)
55. Pave (4)
56. Beasts of burden (4)
57. But (4)
59. Anatomical joint (4)
60. Weather directions (4)
62. Old British monetary system, abb. (3)
63. Broadcast (3)
64. Pair of artistes (2)
67. Year, abb. (2)

Last week's solution

Three years after the UN's Decade for the Disabled ended, full integration into mainstream society is still a lofty goal for the majority of the world's 500 million handicapped. In light of International Day for the Disabled, 3 December, *Al-Ahram Weekly* focuses on the challenges they face in Egypt

Defying barriers

Locked out of sight

The six million or so disabled in Egypt find integrating into society more than just a challenge, writes **Jasmine Maklad**

"All I want is to be able to leave my house without anyone's help, to walk through the streets without constantly being reminded that I am different, to attend school with other children my age, and to play games like everyone else," says 14 year-old Rasha Soliman who suffers from deformed hands.

For many people this is not too much to ask, but for disabled people living in Egypt and other developing nations worldwide, this is often a dream which, until now, does not come true.

Facilitating integration of the disabled into society is a task which Egypt has been striving to achieve for the past 20 years. But despite efforts to *provide opportunities* for the disabled and change society's attitudes towards them, the number of disabled persons who actually integrate fully into society is low.

Social misconceptions and hostile attitudes have traditionally made integration a difficult task. Giving birth to a disabled child has long been considered an embarrassment in Egypt. "When I was young my parents would not let me leave the house and when visitors came I was locked in my room," said Mona, 23, who is paralysed from the waist down.

"Instead of encouraging disabled persons to pursue normal lives, parents often hide them and shelter them from society," said Dr Naguib Khouzam, professor of educational psychology at Ain Shams University and supervisor of Support Education and Training for Integration (SETI), a CARITAS project catering for the disabled.

Over the past decade, however, efforts exerted through education and the media have had a tremendous effect on social attitudes. "Several years ago, when I took our disabled patients on an outing, everyone would stare. Some people would criticise and others would run away out of fear," said Fatma Ali Sayed, head nurse at Behmen Hospital, who has been dealing with the mentally disabled for over 20 years. "Now it is very rare that you find someone who doesn't understand or realise that disability is something natural which everyone must accept and respect," she said.

Nonetheless, more needs to be done. "It is not enough that people no longer make fun of the disabled. Knowledge is still lacking, and the attitude is often that help for the disabled is charity and not a disabled person's right," stressed Khouzam. Attitudes must continue to change, to further facilitate the full integration of disabled persons into society, he added.

Hosam Gomaa, a physically disabled cartoonist, agrees that attitudes must shift from pity and charity to acknowledgment of rights. "People should not help us because we are disabled, they should do so because this is our right. Instead of admiring the talents of the handicapped, Egyptians only feel pity towards them," he stressed.

The number of those who receive education or rehabilitation is an important indicator of how well the disabled integrate into society. Unfortunately, experts emphasise that only two to five per cent of the disabled attend educational institutions or rehabilitation centres.

"I would be very optimistic if I said that of the 2 million or so mentally disabled in Egypt 10,000 utilise rehabilitation facilities," said Dr Osman Farrag, professor *emeritus* of psychology at the American University in Cairo (AUC) and board chairman of Abaa wa Abnaa, an association for rehabilitation of the mentally disabled. For other disabilities however, the number is significantly higher because the cases are easier to deal with.

"These figures are, however, higher than those for other developing countries, mainly because Egypt started its first programmes for the disabled much earlier on, in the 1930s," Farrag said. But compared to the West "we are far below the average for institutionalisation," Farrag stressed.

There are several hundred schools which cater for the disabled in Egypt, according to official statistics, but government and non-governmental organisation facilities can only accommodate small numbers — on average these centres cater for only 40 to 50 students.

Providing educational opportunities for the disabled is further hindered by severe financial constraints and a lack of trained personnel. "Exorbitant costs are to a great extent responsible. Developing countries have difficulties providing for the needs of normal children so there is a realisation of priorities to consider," Farrag explained.

Another problem, according to Dr J Abdallah, a psychology professor at AUC, is that the centres are not geared towards integration. "Centres and schools should be oriented towards integration into society and not just rehabilitation. They also need to be specialised to cater for specific disabilities," she said.

Even if the centres were reoriented, many disabled people will still be discontent. "We [the blind], along with other disabled people, should be taught in ordinary schools to help us become more sociable and to make other people treat us properly," said Heba, a blind student. Ostracising the disabled does not facilitate integration, but currently very few schools exist which allow disabled persons to learn alongside other children.

The screening system in these special schools is also in dire need of revision. "Currently children are lumped together and no differentiation is made between the varying degrees of disability," explained Abdallah. "Screening and diagnosis are definitely inadequate," agreed Khouzam. "We need to train people for these purposes in order to provide more quality care," he added.

Despite the problems facing special education centres, for the 5 per cent who do study, a more pressing obstacle to integration remains: public facilities. In developing countries where the basic infrastructure such as roads, telecommunication networks and electricity grids are lacking, facilities for the disabled are often non-existent.

Although in Egypt laws do exist ensuring jobs for disabled persons in government departments (they should account for a minimum of five per cent of those employed), *no laws exist* stating that ramps, elevators and other necessary facilities be available in buildings to accommodate the disabled.

"There is enough legislation to give support for the disabled to work and integrate into society but, as in many developing countries, these are not well enforced," said Farrag, also a board member of the government's High Council for Rehabilitation of the Disabled. "Also the law ensuring the disabled positions requires that those appointed hold graduate diplomas from rehabilitation centres," he said, adding that for these reasons the number of disabled persons working is "extremely low".

Whether or not the employment law is enforced, "the jobs offered are often degrading," complained Ahmed Khater, 25, a *blind English literature lecturer at Helwan* University. "Finding a decent job is just part of the problem. How can the disabled work or study when they cannot access government buildings, educational institutions and other public or private organisations?" he asked.

"When I was employed I was told I need only to show up once a month to collect my pay. People do not acknowledge our rights to lead normal lives. They only pity us [the disabled] instead of providing us with true work opportunities, facilities and means of transportation," said Tarek, a 40 year-old quadriplegic.

In general, facilities accommodating the disabled do not exist, said Abdallah, adding that this was another result of social attitudes which did not accept the disabled. "Social attitudes have changed but the practical outlook has not caught up yet," he explained.

"The streets are not fit for ordinary people, so how can the disabled cope? Setting standards for the provision of facilities to enable free and easy movement of disabled persons in society is essential," stressed Farrag. Although the high council is not looking into this matter at the moment, Farrag believes the council should be the one to formulate a suitable policy and certainly hopes *"this will be the next step"*.

It may take a long time before a disabled person can move easily around Egypt. But signs of a better future are already on the horizon: the Cairo International Conference Centre has installed ramps, special parking and easy access to lifts for those who deserve special care; the second line of the underground will also make provisions for the disabled; and deaf and dumb employees now serve customers at a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise in the Dokki district of Cairo.



photos: Mustafa El-Senousi

photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Little special care

MANY schools for the disabled are unable to provide the necessary care for lack of qualified personnel. On average only 20 to 30 per cent of those teaching in institutions are specialised to deal with the disabled.

To work in government schools, teachers must have undergone one year in an institute affiliated to the Ministry of Education. But the institute can only train 150 teachers annually, said Zeinab Salem, head of one of the special education departments at the Ministry of Education. Also, many of those who are specialised teachers prefer to work in richer Arab countries where salaries are much higher, said Abdel-Moneim Shahine, headmaster of a school for the deaf and dumb in Al-Haram district of Cairo.

Non-governmental institutions do not require specific qualifications. They just "want the staff to like and understand the disabled to begin with," said Dr Sara Loza, of Behmen Hospital, which has a section for the disabled. "After that, employees are trained at local centres by professionals to learn how to deal with the disabled," she said.

The shortage of teachers has forced some schools to increase the number of students in each class. As a result children do not receive the individualised care they require. The situation is somewhat better in non-governmental institutions which have an average of 40 to 60 students each. There are only three to six pupils in each class. Such low numbers make individual care more feasible and in some institutions an educational programme is set for each child.

Unfortunately not many of Egypt's disabled are looked after in schools. Only around five per cent of the Egyptian disabled attend specialised schools, according to Dr Abdel-Salam El-Banna, counsellor of rehabilitation at the Ministry of Social Affairs. El-Banna believes that a *shortage of schools*, lack of awareness and lack of finance are responsible for this small figure.

RR

Hearing the distance

The world's only known blind photographer comes home. **Jihan Ammar** and **Rashda Ragab** watch him work

There was a *lot of commotion* at Nazih Rizk's most recent photo exhibition. Azza El-Itribi, of "Shari'a Al-Fan" (Artists' Street) fame, scrutinised the photos while thinking of questions for her television interview with the photographer. Meanwhile, El-Itribi's director of photography questioned Rizk on various technical points. It was a heated discussion. And, sidling up to the man of the hour was a woman of questionable sanity who insisted on discussing how she too could live in America. The sound man began the count and after he counted down, "Five, four, three, two, one", El-Itribi began her interview with the world's only known blind photographer.

Nazih Rizk is in Egypt, his home country, to exhibit his latest work, a collection of photos from America and Egypt. The most impressive thing about the exhibition is that the artist is blind. How is it that a blind man shoots a perfectly framed and focused shot of dancers on stage or a carnival at night, or a portrait of a couple on the beach at sunset? Many of the shots in the exhibition require the photographer to measure area light for proper exposure. These are complicated and tricky scenes. But Rizk accomplishes the task even though there is *absolutely no light* reception in his vision.

These facts are hard for most people to digest. El-Itribi was certainly skeptical and so were others who simply could not accept the idea of such a contradiction in terms — by definition, a blind photographer cannot be.

Rizk's own explanation is that he replaces his eyes with the rest of his senses. His sense of hearing, *smell* and *taste* make up for his loss of sight. This way, according to Rizk, he "sees" things the rest of us do not. Training his senses took some years, says Rizk. He measures subject distance from the camera by listening *intently to vibrations* in the air such as wind.

But seeing is believing. Rizk demonstrated his photographic technique last week while shooting a panorama scene from the top of the Meridien Hotel in Garden City. To sharpen his senses, Rizk fasts for 24 hours before he goes on a shoot. He explained that the fast enables him to concentrate better while he is shooting. Indeed, Rizk seems to be concentrating so much that he appears to be in a trance. After the meditation process is over, Rizk bases his calculations for exposure on a combination of what he has sensed and his knowledge of the camera.

By memorising the controls on all of his cameras which include a Yashica, a Canon, and a Hasslebad, Rizk can operate them manually and adjust the focus. Proper focusing is accomplished by sensing subject-to-camera distance and then setting the distance on the camera's focusing ring. When taking portraits of people, Rizk asks the subject to talk until he can "hear the distance". For nature scenes he listens for background noise and his acute sense tells him the approximate distance.

Tricky lighting situations do not intimidate Rizk. The amount of sunlight on a scene is obtrusive if one just feels the heat, explains Rizk. For subjects which are backlit, Rizk opts for a silhouette effect. Rizk's favourite subjects are nature scenes. "Green spaces, rivers, seas and animals have haunted me since childhood," said Rizk.

Of course Rizk makes sure someone, usually his wife, accompanies him on his photo shoots. People can help by describing the scene before him, but Rizk insists that he alone composes and exposes.

His method is his mark. In fact, a Japanese company has offered to market a camera designed by Rizk, utilising the blind photographer's "technology of the senses". Testimony to his skill are the many photography exhibitions he has held around the world. His first was in 1987 at the French Cultural Centre in Egypt. Since then he has exhibited in 35 states in America, Europe and Egypt. Almost 10 years later and having lived in America for eight years, Al-Ahram brought Rizk back to Egypt for an exhibition and to award him the institution's Gold Medal. Several American cities have honoured him with their keys.

Since public reception has been so warm, Rizk says his next step is to obtain a Ph.D. with a dissertation on "technology of the senses" from Columbia University. Twelve years ago he earned an MA in Sociology From the Faculty of Arts at Ain Shams University. Today he lectures on photography at various institutions for the blind throughout America.

Other aspiring disabled artists may learn a lot about the impossible from Rizk. The photographer lost his sight 20 years ago at the age of 16. As a young man growing up in the Shubra district of Cairo, he never really considered a career in photography. It was only years later after the accident which cost him his sight, that a friend presented him with a camera. The well-wisher offered his gift just as Rizk was to undergo surgery to restore his sight. Although the operation failed and Rizk remained blind, he decided to take up photography as a hobby. "I decided to see through the camera", he recalls. After spending months memorising manuals and studying technical points of the art with the help of friends, Rizk began working as an artist full time.

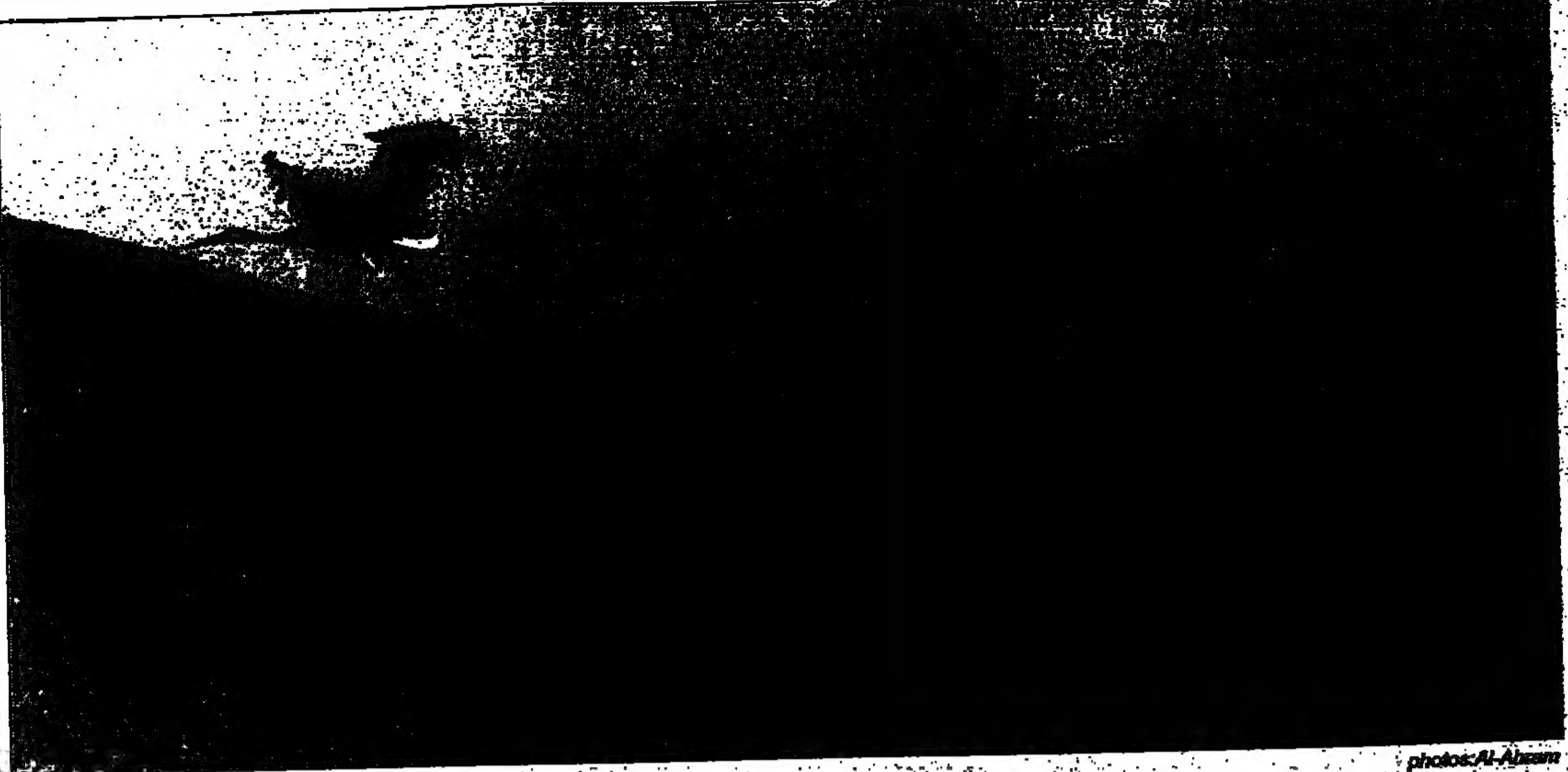
Currently, he is working on a book about Egypt. "I would like to photograph the country from top to bottom and east to west. My ideal collection would be a reflection of Egypt's strong cultural legacy," said the artist. Rizk's thoughts linger with his home country as he hopes that one day soon he will return to Egypt to open a photography studio.



Green spaces and nature scenes have haunted Rizk since childhood(left); the photographer charges his senses (right) *photo: Jihan Ammar*

Edited by **Fouad El-Gawhary**





There are as many as a hundred million birds per square kilometre flying over Egypt during migration season

photos: Al-Ahram

Visitors on the wing

Birdwatching has yet to become a popular pursuit in Egypt. But, as Sherine Nasr reports, efforts are under way to encourage tourists with an ornithological bent. Meanwhile, conservationists are struggling to ensure that the only dangers the migrants face are natural ones

Egypt has a wealth of bird life; the Ornithological Society of Egypt has recorded 450 species, two thirds of which are migratory. Yet, unlike some other countries in the Middle East, which have long attracted visitors to pursue ornithological interests, Egypt has yet to establish itself as a birdwatching destination, with only four or five hundred enthusiasts coming to Egypt every year. However, plans are afoot to promote the country as a destination for bird lovers from around the world.

It is Egypt's place on migration routes which adds a particularly fascinating dimension to its ornithological scene. A German study estimated that at some points during the migration season there may be as many as a hundred million birds per square kilometre flying over Egypt.

"Of course we don't see all of them. We only see the ones that land here," explained Mindi Baha'eddin, educational coordinator for the International Council for the Preservation of Birds in Cairo. "The birds," she added, "travel from their breeding grounds in the former Soviet Union, Scandinavia, Iran and Turkey, to wintering places in Africa. Some even travel as far as South Africa on a journey that takes up to a week."

Different parts of Egypt attract different species of migrants, and at different times of year. From August to October, for example, Al-Zaraniq nature reserve is the way station for ducks, herons, plovers and seagulls. The whole Mediterranean coastline from Salloum on the Libyan border to Rafah in Sinai is a stopover for large numbers of quail.

Birds of prey like the peregine falcon, eagle, vulture, osprey and black-winged kite, are particularly abundant in the Gulf of Suez in October and November.

The wetlands of the northern coast, around lakes Al-Bardawil, Al-Manzala and Al-Borollos, provide excellent conditions for migrant visitors, in terms of food and weather. In fact, conditions are so ideal that some species, including swans, pelicans and flamingoes, have decided to take up full-time residence in Egypt.

During the summer months, the Red Sea becomes a major migration highway and it is not unusual for campers from Safaga and Hurghada northwards through the Gulf of Suez to see storks in abundance. While lighter birds fly over Zeid mountain, north of Hurghada, before crossing the Gulf, storks and heavier birds of prey usually fly over land. "In winter, some birds come all the way from Europe to spend the season in Egypt before returning to their homelands. Others come from South Africa, Kenya and the Sudan in summer," said Baha'eddin.

The annual migration is a hazardous journey in any circumstances. But mankind has added to the natural dangers. Aside from our inherent responsibility to the natural world, any development of birdwatching tourism will depend on the continued existence of the various species, and their natural environments.

For Baha'eddin, the protection of birds is a question of public awareness. "People should understand that they don't belong to one country," she said.

Indiscriminate and uncontrolled hunting represents a major threat to bird life. Fortunately, the Environment Affairs Authority has now taken strict measures to control hunting, especially in the Mediterranean region, where birds, especially quail, are trapped in nets for food. Regulations now demand that nets be 300 metres away from the shore and that a distance of 10 metres be left between the nets. Moreover, the nets must be made of soft material to ensure that trapped birds do not suffer unnecessary pain. Since the introduction of these rules, the number of quail is steadily increasing.

Main migration routes through Egypt

For birds of prey, too, hunters still pose a very real threat. The falcon population is still declining despite a legal ban on hunting. "These species are sought after by hunters from the Arab Gulf", explained Mohamed Abdel-Fattah, head of the Wildlife Preservation Department at Giza Zoological Gardens. "A well-trained falcon is sold for more than LE20,000."

The government's establishment of several nature reserves by ministerial decree in 1985 was another step towards preserving Egypt's wealth of birds.

However, the problem of the destruction of natural habitats remains. Land reclamation has shrunk the wetlands around the northern lakes, which are a rich environment for ducks, herons and flamingoes. There have been calls to reduce the size of Al-Zaraniq reserve, 40km west of Al-Arish, considered Egypt's biggest centre of bird migration, and one of the world's main migratory routes. In Wadi Al-Natroun too, lakes which were once the habitat of small birds no longer exist. And where lakes remain, pollution is a problem, albeit one the government is attempting to deal with. "Pesticides were used extensively in the 1980s and caused a lot of damage," said Baha'eddin. "However, the government is now controlling their use."

As the battles against hunting and the destruction of natural habitats continue, those involved in tourism and ornithology are determined to promote Egypt's immense variety of bird life to visitors.

"The world is full of bird-watching enthusiasts," said Abdel-Fattah. "The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the United Kingdom has 30,000 members alone, a few of whom come to Egypt during the peak seasons in spring and autumn, and the Scandinavians are also great birdwatchers."

Obviously birdwatchers' requirements are different from those of the average tourist. "It is our task to design different programmes," said Hisham Abu-Sa'da, a tourism manager. "We must remember that birdwatchers usually travel in small groups or even individually." Egyptian travel agencies, he says, have not taken the opportunity to publicise and market this kind of tourism. Only a few companies so far have specialised programmes and bird-watching trips have never been organised on a regular basis.

But this situation is about to change, Baha'eddin asserts, as Egypt prepares to win itself a larger share of the world's estimated 500,000 birdwatchers.

December quiz



Here is the first question of December's quiz:

An Arab city, built in 670AD by Oqba Ibn Nafie, is considered to be the first Muslim city built in North Africa and Islam's third holy city after Mecca and Jerusalem. What is it?

Remember to send the answers of the November quiz before the deadline on 15 December.

Name...
Address...
Tel. No. (if available)..
Answer to Question 1, issue 245
Answer to Question 2, issue 246
Answer to Question 3, issue 247
Answer to Question 4, issue 248

Post your entry to
Travel Quiz
Al-Ahram Weekly,
Al-Ahram,
9th Floor,
Sharia Al-Galaa,
Cairo.

Complementary lines

Aging with dignity

Jarolaw Dobrowolski captures the mood of an unpretentious edifice in medieval Cairo, while **Helen Miles** describes its history and function

The school of Sultan Al-Mansour Qalawun is a venerable edifice which wears its seven centuries with dignity. The walls of the courtyard are flaking with age, creepers trail down over the broken crenellations, and the flagstones are cracked and uneven. Yet, as with all monuments built to reflect the power and pride of their mighty benefactors, time has not been able to erase its majesty.

The sultan was an ambitious man made good through a campaign inspired by ruthless determination. A Tartar from the Lower Volga, he came to Egypt as a Bahri Mamluke, and assassinated, deposed or contrived the removal of his opponents. His efforts paid off and Qalawun's dynasty ruled Egypt for one hundred years.

In the midst of his far-flung military exploits, Qalawun supported philanthropic projects in Egypt. The school sketched here is part of an impressive complex of buildings including a mausoleum and a hospital which was considered one of the best of its day.

Intended as a school for theology and law, the building now serves purely as a mosque. It was built using new styles and techniques imported from Syria and boasts a classical columned sanctuary, now illuminated with fluorescent lights, a *mihrab* decorated with Syrian glass mosaics, and restored stucco work looking as fresh as a cleaned detail on a faded masterpiece.

The school is on the left of Al-Muizz Liddin Allah Street in Islamic Cairo if you are coming from Al-Azhar Street, past the perfume, gold and brass shops. Walk beneath the soaring portal of the Qalawun complex, now obscured by scaffolding. The entrance is on the left of a covered corridor which also leads to the mausoleum on the right.



Egypt in the world market

Tourist officials and businessmen from all around the world gathered in London for the World Tourism Market — an opportunity for Egypt to promote itself as a safe destination. Rehab Saad reports

This year's World Tourism Market, held recently in London, attracted 4,050 exhibitors and a total of 60,000 representatives from 157 countries — a massive arena for countries and businesses to promote their tourist products. The market also provided a forum for discussion on topics including regional tourism, quality in tourism, and the new Middle East Mediterranean Travel and Tourism Association.

The Egyptian delegation was led by Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui, who held 40 meetings with officials, businessmen and journalists, including one with the British minister of state for the Foreign Office with responsibility for Middle East affairs.

The ministers discussed the latest Foreign Office advice to travellers to Egypt following two incidents where militants shot at trains on 7 and 8 November. Beltagui was keen to assure the British minister that it had been a random incident, and a sign of the terrorists' growing desperation. No Britons had been injured, he added, and out of the 242,000 British people who visited Egypt this year, none had become victims of terrorism.

He also pointed out that it was inaccurate to refer to Luxor as the site of the shooting, which actually took place in the governorate of Qena. "Luxor has a special status and there have never been any terrorist attacks there," he said later. "It is a distinguished tourist destination, and its reputation should not be tarnished."

In 1993, the year when domestic terrorism was at its peak and tourism declined by 30 per cent, 10.5 per cent of the total number of tourists, the largest single group, came from Britain. In 1994 Britain moved to third place, after promotion of Egypt in the Gulf states attracted an influx of Arab visitors. That year Saudi Arabia took second place after Germany.

In 1995 there was a successful advertising campaign in Britain. Britain moved into second place, with 242,286 tourists coming to Egypt between January and October compared to 199,148 in the same period in 1994, an increase of 21.66 per cent.

Beltagui also spoke about regional peace and its benefits for the tourist industry in an interview with the BBC World Service. He said that tension in the Middle East affects all the countries of the region. By the same token, peace would benefit tourism throughout the region. "Countries in the Middle East should be complementary to each other rather than competitive," he added. "Egypt's tourist relations with Israel are but a part of the general framework which controls the relationship between the two countries."

On the periphery of the conference, a meeting was held by the member countries of the Middle East Mediterranean Travel and Tourist Association (MEMTTA), an organisation inaugurated last month at the Amman summit and includes Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Cyprus and Israel.

The main issue at this meeting was deciding where the group should be based. Beltagui insisted that the headquarters should be in Cairo, because the East Mediterranean Travel Association (EMTA), consisting of Egypt, Turkey and Cyprus, is already headquartered there.

"This new association is an extension to the EMTA and its aims are the same," argued Beltagui. "Increasing the membership to include all the countries of the Mediterranean does not mean we have to relocate the headquarters."

The Tunisian minister of tourism, however, was adamant that the headquarters should be in his country, but Israel, Turkey, Cyprus and Morocco supported Egypt's viewpoint. Matters seemed to have reached an impasse, and the Jordanian minister suggested that the decision should be postponed and that the meeting should concentrate on reaching agreement on the organisation's declaration of general principles. Other member countries agreed to a postponement.

In another development to emerge from the market, Egypt has agreed to a project for the placing of tourist information on the Newsnet service of the Internet — enabling facts about Egypt to reach 30 million people worldwide. The service will be offered for a trial period of three months to research consumer response.

More than Ramses' sons

The tomb of Ramses II's sons may be even larger than was previously thought. Jill Kamil reports on the latest discoveries

In May, the discovery of a vast mausoleum for Ramses II's sons in the Valley of the Kings made headlines throughout the world. Now project director Kent R Weeks has come up with some more startling news: it may contain up to a 100 chambers, far more than the number of his sons.

Last year, when Weeks, who is based at the American University in Cairo, started work at the site, he thought the tomb had six chambers. Last February, the number jumped to 62. "Now we have 80 rooms and the chances are good that there will be many more than that, perhaps as many as 100," he said last week, adding that "the tomb raises more questions than answers".

So, what were the chambers for? "We don't know," said Abdel-Halim Noureddin, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, "but this may be the biggest burial complex found in Egypt so far".

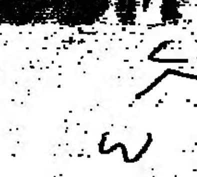
Ramses II, who ruled Egypt from 1290 to 1224 BC is the only pharaoh known to have built a mausoleum for members of his family. But then, he is a pharaoh who never ceases to surprise Egyptologists. He is known to have had 52 sons, and the prospect that the tomb also contains the tombs of princesses is an exciting one.

The tomb, known in archaeological circles as KV5, is the largest and most unusual ever found in the Valley of the Kings. Its large 16-pillared hall has corridors radiating off it in several directions. Last season's discovery of a long T-shaped corridor, with scores of small chambers thought to be chapels for the royal sons, whose sarcophagi perhaps lie in tomb chambers at a lower level, excited archaeologists. "Fragments of 10 different sarcophagi were found on the floor," said Weeks; thousands of potsherds, hundreds of fragments of jewellery, statuettes, alabaster jars, bones and mummy fragments were also found.

Then this season, while clearing the area at the *front* of the pillared hall, more corridors were discovered extending beyond the front of the tomb and containing more small chambers to right and left.

This has led to much speculation. The discovery proves that the tomb is unique, both in design and size. There is nothing with which to compare it. So far, the hieroglyphic texts and scenes carved on the tomb walls have given the names of only two sons of Ramses II. Texts on objects give two more. "And there is a possibility that two of Ramses' sons were buried elsewhere," commented Weeks. "This tomb offers us an exciting chance to learn more about the family of one of Egypt's most powerful rulers," he added.

Tomb KV5 seems destined, too, to cast light on architectural features never before considered. But that all depends on what Weeks' archaeological team finds at the end of the two newly-excavated corridors.



Athletically able disabled

Athletes from Africa and the Arab world threw aside canes and crutches to compete in the 2nd Afro-Arab Championship for the Disabled writes **Abeer Anwar**







Win, lose or draw, 250 of Africa and the Arab World's disabled athletes experienced the thrill of competition in the 2nd Afro-Arab Championship for the Disabled

photos: Ahmed Abdel-Razeq

As competition in the 2nd Afro-Arab Championship for the Disabled drew to a close on Sunday, Egypt's team of athletes took first place in the competition with 77 gold, 55 silver and 30 bronze medals. They were trailed by Algeria in second and Kuwait in third.

The 250 handicapped athletes representing 14 different Arab and African countries may have had to limp, hobble or wheel their way into the Olympic Centre, but they did so determined to achieve. In this regard, they were all winners.

The three day, four event competition, which began on 30 November and ended 2 December, was a qualification venue for the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. By defeating Iraq in the volleyball competition, Egypt secured its place in Atlanta. It has already qualified for the swimming, weightlifting, athletics and table tennis competitions.

While there are 18 competitions available for the disabled, this competition only held four, a move that Dr Nabil Salem, head of the Egyptian Disabled Federation (EDF), said was "designed to minimise expenses." He added that "we also combined the Arab and African championships into one competition for the same reason." The four events were athletics, swimming, volleyball and table tennis.

In the athletics competition, Egypt's main competition came from the small but powerful Algerian squad. "Although we were training for the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, we were able to put together another team for this competition," said Dr Hamdi Abdel-Rahim, coach of the disabled athletics team. "However, the Algerian team included some athletes who were blind and mentally disabled. We didn't have athletes to fill these categories, consequently, Algeria won this competition," said Abdel-Rahim.

But Ezzeddin Macrous, head of the Algerian delegation, held a differing opinion. "We have trained long and hard for this competition since there aren't many tournaments of this kind in Algeria," he said. "And because we came with a small delegation of 22 athletes, the only way to realise the second place finish we desired was to win the athletics competition.

While Egypt finished second in this competition, some Egyptian athletes managed to break some records. Sprinter Ahmed Khairy set a new record in the 400m dash, shattering the one set in the 1994 world championship in Germany, and Hesham El-Mesiri set a new record in the discus throw. In the table tennis and weightlifting competitions, Egypt faced no strong rivals and easily walked away with first place.

While Egypt and some other countries were busy raking in the medals, participants and officials, alike, expressed their satisfaction with the tournament. Abdel-Rahman Omar, head of the Syrian delegation, stated that "the competition was like no other held before." After the championship, representatives of the International Disabled Federation (IDF) said the tournament was well organised, asked Egypt to hold it every year and requested that it organise the 1998 World Volleyball Championship for the Disabled.

The reason for this warm reception, said Salem, was that it was sponsored by businessmen, not the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports.

Chop flop

The Egyptian tae kwon do team last week couldn't find the chi to victory in the World Championships. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports



Even Egypt's most skilled martial artist, Goodwill Games bronze medalist Yehia Allam's kicks and punches missed the mark

photo: Amr Gamal

The egg on the faces of the Egyptian national tae kwon do team members, following their 13th place finish in the World Championships in the Philippines, was probably a welcome change of pace from being kicked in the face during that competition. But, it was still hard to swallow.

While many argue that the lousy finish is a result of a foul-up by the Egyptian Tae Kwon Do Federation's (ETF) new management, or an outcome of policies adopted by the federation's previous administrators, according to the ETF's new manager, Amr Khairy, "it was no surprise."

"After the team's victory in the 5th All Africa Games last September, it was practically impossible to keep the competitors at their peak conditioning for another two months," said Khairy

Following their gold medal finish in the Zimbabwe Games, their third place finish in the World Cup in the Cayman Islands, where South Korea took first and Mexico, second, it was expected that the team would place in the top four in the championship.

But, explained Khairy, who only three months ago was the national team's coach, before any big competition, it usually takes about three months to gradually build up the competitor's physical fitness, skill and endurance levels to their maximum. After the competition, however, the peak performance curve must decline before the cycle can begin again. Since the World Championship occurred only 45 days after the Zimbabwe Games, the competitors did not have time to regain their stamina.

"We had no choice but to focus on winning the African medals," said Khairy, in order to prevent ETF officials from receiving a tongue-lashing by the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS), who forked over a total of LE150,000 and would accept nothing but victory in return.

The martial artists, however, begged to differ, arguing that biased referees were to blame for the shoddy finish. Except for the seemingly invincible South Korean team, they maintained, none of the countries favoured to win, or place highly even came close to falling in the first ten slots. For example, they noted, Mexico, which came in second in the last World Championship, placed 14th, while host country, the Philippines, came in second, dubbing their accomplishment their first progressive international achievement.

Accusations aside, however, there were two factors which did play into the equation. The first was that after the Zimbabwe Games, Tamer Abdel-Moneim injured his knee and Alaa Ismail broke his arm. With no substitutes available to compete in the World Championship, the two martial artists were forced to compete, clearly at a disadvantage. The second factor was that the ETF was on the verge of bankruptcy prior to the tournament. This placed the team's members under added pressure. Although they were able to finagle another LE100,000 out of the SCYS, this was only due to their past accomplishments. While they placed tenth in the last World Championship in 1993, in the months that followed they embarked on a European tour where they took first in competitions in Greece, Belgium and Italy. They also placed second, after South Korea, in the Egyptian Open and the Korean Open. These victories may have prompted the SCYS to grant additional funding, but it was painfully obvious to the ETF and the competitors that there was something amiss.

Some changes, said Khairy, must be made to promote Tae Kwon Do in Egypt. In short, new martial artists of a similar caliber must be recruited. "For the last year, the federation has concentrated on honing the skill of the national team by granting them the opportunity to compete abroad. But now, it's high time we begin focusing on recruiting new talent while developing the skills of those already participating," he stated.

Keeping in line with this logic, until the World Cup in April 1996, the team will not travel abroad to compete. Instead, they will compete in more domestic competitions. But whether this new policy will bear fruit is something only time will tell.

Ruud awakening

A fake to the right, a slide to the left, sink the ball in the net and shake it all about. This, writes **Eric Asomugha**, was Egypt's strategy in the Four Nations Cup

For Egyptian national soccer team coach Ruud Krol, Egypt's second place finish in the Four Nation's Cup in South Africa qualifies as the first notch on his goal post. But for the team, it is the first success since they, along with Cameroon, were the only African nations to qualify for the 1990 World Cup in Italy.

And with a less than stellar record in its recent history, the team has had little to brag about since this second-place finish. They have been knocked out of the first round of three African Nation's Cup competitions, and failed to qualify for the 1994 World Cup in the US. Friendly matches played against other international teams were more bitter than friendly. In all, for a team that was Africa's first representative in the 1924 Olympics and the first winner of the Nations Cup in 1957, it had been the summer, spring, autumn and winter of their discontent.

The strong finish in the Four Nations Cup, however, has elevated team and fan spirits alike, and spurred on an appetite for victory that only the African Cup of Nations finals in January can satisfy.

Sweet as it was, the second-place finish didn't come easily. Following a 2-2 tie with Zimbabwe and a 2-0 loss to South Africa, the Egyptian team found itself in a corner from which they could only extract themselves by beating Zambia. From the start of the match against Zambia, Egypt played a fast-paced, aggressive game. Team Captain Ahmed El-Kass, who scored the team's first goal in the 20th minute, was a tactical whiz, setting up his teammates with prime opportunities upon which Ali Maher quickly capitalised. A few minutes before half-time, Maher raced down the right side of the field and introduced the ball to its new home—Zambia's net.

In the second half, the team went on the defensive, a move which could have cost them some valuable goals had the Zambians been able to take better advantage of what, at times, appeared to be a clumsy Egyptian defensive line. The Zambians, however, managed to nudge the ball once into the goal before the Egyptians took control again. By the end of the match, Egypt was leading 3-1, and had managed to redeem itself against Zambia to whom it had suffered a 1-0 loss in the 1992 Nations Cup.

In the match against Zimbabwe, Maher, a glutton for attention who scored four goals throughout the tournament, the most by any player in the competition, dribbled his way into the limelight with a spectacular goal that left Zimbabwe's goalie, Bruce Grobbelaar, scratching his head in amazement. Maher, who is a Tersana Club striker, was unable to make the team three years ago. But selected from the ranks of the ex-Olympic team, he managed to distinguish himself by becoming the top goal-scorer in the All Africa Games gold medalist Egyptian team. He scored six goals in the Games, including two in the final match. In the Four Nations Cup, Egypt tied Zimbabwe 2-2.

The team's strong finish in this competition is no mere coincidence. Rather, it is a result of some reshuffling, reorganisation and careful planning by Dutchman Ruud Krol. While in the past the team had suffered due to a string of coaches who came and went as frequently as the tide, the Four Nations experiment paid off, giving some good players a previously unavailable chance to prove themselves on the field. Many of this team's players were drawn from the National B Team or the ex-Olympic team, as it is otherwise known. It is also a testimony to Krol's coaching skill.

With the Four Nations Cup over and done with, Krol plans on riding the beginnings of this wave of success until it crests, hopefully in the African Nations Cup in South Africa. Consequently, he has begun working on a plan of action to get the team better prepared for what is sure to be a tough competition. Among the steps he has taken is to cancel four of the six international friendly matches the team was scheduled to play. The team will now play Ghana on 29 December and Tunisia on 8 January before departing for South Africa.

Jocks in the ballot box

Along with national budgetary and social issues, the newly-elected People's Assembly could find itself debating sports. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** reports

Joining almost 4,000 candidates running for seats in the People's Assembly were twenty representatives and officials in the wide world of Egyptian sports. For these candidates, running in the elections was more than just a move to quell the competitive spirit or to prove that not all jocks are dumb. As Talaat Fawaz, a former member of the Egyptian Soccer Federation and a representative in the outgoing People's Assembly, put it, "Being sportsmen doesn't mean that we don't understand politics. On the contrary, we understand it quite well since it invades every facet of life, among which sports is one."

In any case, six of these candidates garnered enough support to win seats. Abdel-Moneim Emara, head of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS) and Abdel-Ahad Gamal Eddin, ex-head of the SCYS, are among those jock supporters and officials who shouldered their way past the competition. In their corner, for support, they have a powerful line-up of die-hard colleagues including businessman Samir Zaher, current deputy of the Egyptian Soccer Federation and numerous administrators who were, at one time, soccer players such as Dr Hossam Badrawi (Ahli player), Mahmoud Sultan, a noted TV anchor man and member of the Ahli Club's board of directors and Mahmoud Marouf, a famous sports correspondent and a Zamalek fan.

At first glance this may seem to be an Ahli or Zamalek fan's nightmare depending on one's team allegiance. But Marouf offers some words of assurance. "I know Ahli fans will think of me as a rival, but I hope that they will trust the power of my pen rather than my team bias," he said.

As in all competitions, there were some casualties. And among the most notable was Mahmoud Bakr, president of the Alexandria Olympic team. Bakr was knocked out of the running due to a nervous breakdown that landed him in intensive care. Ever the good sport, however, he expressed his best wishes to those athlete politicians who won, urging them to do their best to enrich and promote sports over the next few years.

His hopes, if Abdel-Moneim Emara has anything to do with it, will be addressed. "Sports in other countries help generate revenue for the country, but here, in Egypt, it simply consumes money," said Emara. "We will try to remedy this through different channels."

According to Samir Zaher, already there are some serious plans to privatise sports being considered. "Privatisation of sports aims at reducing the amount of money spent by the state on sports," he said. "This will be done by implementing systems or models similar to those found in Europe, Asia and the US." A case in point is Ahmed Barada, the 17 year-old squash champion who has been sponsored by Ibrahim Kamel, former head of the Egyptian Tennis Federation and now a private businessman. Had it not been for funding by Kamel, Barada probably would not have risen to his current level.

Zaher has also suggested making better use of TV for marketing matches and soliciting advertising. But, he noted, "we will never be able to accomplish what we want without seriously studying the issues and focusing on research done by experts in relevant fields."

Along with privatising sports, Emara believes that having professional teams in Egypt will greatly benefit the country, allowing amateur athletes to draw upon the experience of their professional counterparts.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Youssef Gohar: Life's ciphers

He learned to love stories as a child: stories spoken aloud, that sparked the imagination — stories so vivid you could almost see them. The written word was never quite enough, and so he wrote for the screen





L-r: receiving the State Merit Award for literature in 1984 from president Mubarak; with Tawfiq El-Hakim (far left) and Hussein Fawzi (far right); strolling along the Corniche in Alexandria with Naguib Mahfouz whose works he adapted for the screen



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Mention Youssef Gohar's name and people's eyes light up with memories of the novels he brought to life on screen: innumerable works by Naguib Mahfouz, not least *Bayn Al-Qasrain* (Palace Walk) Taha Hussein's *Do'aa Al-Qarawan* (The Plover's Call) and Tawfiq El-Hakim's *Al-Ribat Al-Muqadass* (The Hallowed Link). His name figures prominently among a generation of outstanding screenplay writers: Ahmed Badrakhan, Anwar Wagdi, Sayed Bedeir, Abdel-Warith Assar and Abbas Helmi. Gohar's contribution has been the fusion of the two genres, the fluid adaptation of fiction to cinema.

Born in 1912, Gohar spent part of his childhood in Qus in the Upper Egyptian Governorate of Qena. An only child, he had a very sheltered upbringing: never allowed out on the street to play with other boys, Gohar created a host of characters to people his imagination in the hours of his solitude. He attributes his passion for narrative, whether literary or cinematic, to his mother's exceptional talent as story-teller, particularly of parables from the Gospels. "She had an excellent memory and knew many stories and poems by heart, though she could not read and write very well". The story is in the telling: perhaps Gohar's passion for adapting novels to a visual medium is rooted in this echo of oral culture — the stories told to an enraptured listener must have seemed far more alive than the solitary interaction of the reader with the written word.

His father, who had a number of not altogether successful tenures as editor-in-chief of religious magazines, kept him in constant supply of journals, particularly literary ones. He recalls that the first short story he read was by Mahmoud Taymour in *Al-Hilal* magazine. Years later, when Gohar was a budding writer, his dream to meet Taymour came true: he even enjoyed the guidance of this literary doyen. In his teenage years, Gohar also discovered Dickens and read voraciously all his novels available in translation.

At school, Gohar was already acquiring a reputation for being something of a story-teller himself. Encouragement came from his Arabic teacher, who often had him read what he had written out loud to the class. But it was while in his second year as undergraduate at the Faculty of Law, Cairo University that he wrote what he now describes, with no hint of embarrassment at his youthful inexperience, as "a rather naive story" which was later published in the weekly *Al-Siassa*. His stories soon started appearing in other magazines, until Mustafa Amin, veteran journalist and founder of Akhbar Al-Yom Establishment, approached him about becoming a regular contributor to the weekly magazine, *Akher Sa'a*. This growing recognition — and, maybe, the desire to have a more immediate, visual impact on a wider audience — allowed him an entrée into the world of cinema. Having followed Gohar's first steps as a writer, producer Asia spotted a potential screenplay writer and commissioned his first work: *Al-Muttahama* (The Accused). More commissions followed, but Gohar bloomed — and made his mark — adapting literary texts to the screen.

His involvement in screenplay writing seems to have shaped his idiom in many ways. A prolific writer, he has shied away from flourishes, addressing social issues through a realist mode accessible to a wide readership in texts very adaptable to cinematic rendition. His 1942 novel, *Da'wat Al-Qafila* (The Call of the Caravan), which won him an award from the prestigious Arabic Language Academy (Magma' Al-Lugha Al-Arabiya), alongside Naguib Mahfouz and Adel Kamel, tackled corruption in government circles. Though he continued to write short stories, more than 25 years were to pass before the appearance of his next novel, *Ummahat Fi Al-Manfa* (Mothers in Exile). This dealt with the effects of the Open Door policy on social values. An Indian summer of fiction writing succeeded its publication, with many of Gohar's novels serialised in the *Al-Ahram*. His commitment to cinema never waned, though; he went so far as to fund the production of a film based on his 1940s story *Ardana Al-Khadraa* (Our Green Land) at his personal expense.

His critics have often taken him to task for what they see as an excessively populist tendency in his writing, for instance in the register of language to which he resorts. When an interviewer once mentioned this charge, Gohar dismissed it summarily: "I write novels for the general Egyptian readership... not for a class of sophisticates... As to language, I choose to write in an accessible classical Arabic, free of complexities... As to dialogue, I favour colloquial, for more realism. I do not imagine that... a fireman would choose his words from the *Mukhtar Al-Sahah* dictionary while putting out a fire."

But how does he interpret critical neglect of his work? "It puzzles me. There is, of course, the partisanship of the critical scene, whereby critics are divided into camps: leftist critics writing about leftist authors, and conservative critics about right-wing authors... But in general one notices that many critics here feel that their task is to find fault, rather than help the reader appreciate the text or guide the author to aspects of his work of which he is not conscious." But critical acclaim did, finally, come Gohar's way: he achieved official recognition with the State Merit Award for literature in 1984.

So what makes a good novel a gripping film? Plot is of the essence, he says; stream of consciousness novels are less interesting once translated onto the screen. To him, screenplay writing should be considered an art unto itself. He has taught the distinct rules of the genre to several generations at the Cinema Institute he helped found in the late 1950s. Although he finds that the standard of script writing among recent graduates of the institute is far superior to that of their predecessors, he laments the commercialism that dominates their outlook. With television series in much demand, many of his former ultimately choose quantity over quality, and end up depleting their talents. Another pet bête noire: last minute changes introduced by producers and directors to flatter the star's ego, changes which the writer rarely vetoes.

Now 83, Gohar leads a quiet, secluded life with his wife in Cairene suburbia. His five children have all flown the nest. A love of story-telling seems to run in the family, right down to his daughters Soheir and Magda who studied German literature in Bonn and Berlin. He sits in cafés to write — he loved the old Shepheard's Hotel — but inspiration still requires a peculiar combination of tranquillity and liveliness. "I always need to prepare myself for the act of writing. I have never really understood those whose pen is always ready, under any circumstances."

What about his autobiography, eminently adaptable to the screen? Many, he says, have reduced the form to a settling of accounts, or have been too preoccupied with singing their own praises to tell the story. The writing of a true autobiography requires complete candour, and the courage for candour — "If I were to write my own, I might inadvertently wound some people I have known, and end up disappointing my readers." But Gohar also feels that, in a sense, there is not much that he has left unsaid about himself: most of his own perceptions and experiences have gone into his creative writing already, if only as ciphers.

Profile by Samir Sobhi

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♣ A secret you probably didn't know about me, dears, is that often are the times that I venture into the wild, revelling in the splendour that is commonly referred to as nature. So it was with great joy that I accepted an invitation to attend next Sunday's first assembly meeting of the Association of Enterprises for Environmental Conservation (AEEC), in the conference room of the main Al-Ahram new building. Held under the auspices of minister of public sector enterprises and state minister for administrative affairs and environment **Atef Ebeid**, and minister of social affairs **Amal Othman**. I also heard through the grapevine that the association's board of directors includes *Al-Ahram* columnist **Salama Ahmed Salama**, the charming head of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, **Shafik Gabr**, internationally renowned *environmentalist* **Mustafa Tolba**, and **Alaa Ezz** coordinator of Al-Ahram's Regional Press Institute. I know for a fact that they and their colleagues will work hard to reach the aim of finding a balance between Egypt's industrial development needs and its disturbing environmental dilemmas.

♦ I have always been a great fan of Indian actress **Shabana Azmi**. So when I heard she was coming to Egypt to chair the 19th International Cairo Film Festival, I knew that sooner or later, I would find a way of meeting her personally at the right time. That time proved to be last Monday evening, when **Shabana** was introduced to the cream of Egyptian society at a reception party held for that purpose by the Indian ambassador **Kanwal Sibal** and his lovely wife **Elisabeth** at their home in Zamalek. Looking most radiant, **Shabana** mingled with ambassadors galore, including those of Pakistan and Bangladesh, head of the film festival **Saad El-Din Wahba**, assistant foreign minister for Asian affairs **Sayed Abu Zeid**, deputy president of the Indian-Egyptian friendship society **Wafaa Hegazi**, the renowned Egyptian director honoured at the festival **Kamal El-Sheikh** and undersecretary at the Ministry of Culture for external affairs **Mohamed Ghoneim**. A wonderful evening, dears, and one that I will always remember as the occasion during which **Shabana** became a good friend to many.

♠ Whenever I'm too busy to go for a long walk by the Nile and gaze wistfully into the horizon, I can always pop over to the fourth floor cafeteria in Al-Ahram's main *building and* admire the new mosaic by artist **Makram Henein**. Made up of over forty thousand pieces of glass, the work colourfully depicts life on the banks of the Nile throughout the ages. It took **Makram** over five months to put the mosaic together, and I just couldn't resist being there to watch him add the few final pieces a few weeks ago, in the hope that he would let me stick on a few myself. No such luck, however. And even when I asked how wise it was to put such a marvellous work of art in a cafeteria, I was told proudly that the five-metre-by-one-metre mosaic was both dust and steam resistant. Ahh...the joys of living in the twentieth century.

♣ A few days ago, I received an invitation to attend a reception party marking the rather sad occasion of Spain's end of term as head of the European Union this month. The reception was held at the home of the Spanish Embassy's press attaché, **Mario Trinidad**, and was attended by a number of press attachés, media representatives from EU member countries and Egyptian and foreign journalists. And as with most receptions, I felt quite at home, surrounded by the familiar faces of senior *Al-Ahram* columnist **Salama A. Salama**, columnist and former chief-editor of Al-Akhbar **Said Sonbol**, and prominent *social thinker* and author of numerous books on civilisations **Anouar Abdel-Malek**. It was also at the reception that I made the acquaintance of the manager of the Spanish news agency, FIF, the most charming **Enrique I Banez**.

♥ There are some photographers who are so talented that one is almost convinced that a greater future awaits them over a distant horizon. When I was invited to the opening of a student exhibition at the American University in Cairo last Sunday, featuring the photographs of **Omar Hilal**, little was I prepared for what I was *actually* faced with. With a title like 'Foreigner', I expected to find photographs reflecting **Omar**'s inner bi-cultural struggle. But what **Omar**'s lens captured, and displayed that day in the lobby of AUC's Jameel Centre still haunts me to this very day. All around me, alien beings emerged...unrecognisable shapes crouching in the dark and staring with dead, glossy eyes. If **Omar** was hoping to make an impression on the guests that evening with his notion of aliens then the looks of awe and admiration on the faces of guests such as advisor to Al-Ahram's chairman of the board **Yehia El-Tokali**, head of the Arab Radio Television satellite station **Hamdi Qandil** *and assistant deputy*-editor of the Al-Ahram press agency **Ahlam El-Reidy**, to mention but a few, definitely reflected the much-deserved success of his third exhibition to date.

♠ It's always useful to have a few friends in the medical profession, especially at my age and during these cold winter months. **Doctor Mohamed Nabil Khalifa**, professor of orthopaedics at Ain Shams University has been a life-long friend of mine, not only because he can soothe my aching joints in a flash, but because he also manages to satisfy my love of art with his glorious photographs of people, the Nile and Egyptian antiquities. Much to my joy, **Khalifa** recently told me that an exhibition of his photography will soon be held sometime in the near future. No need to panic, though, I assure you that as soon as I find out, you, dear readers, will be the first to know.



Top: Makram at work
L-r: Omar's aliens; Anwar Abdel-Malek; Salama A. Salama; Mohamed Khalifa; Shabana Azmi